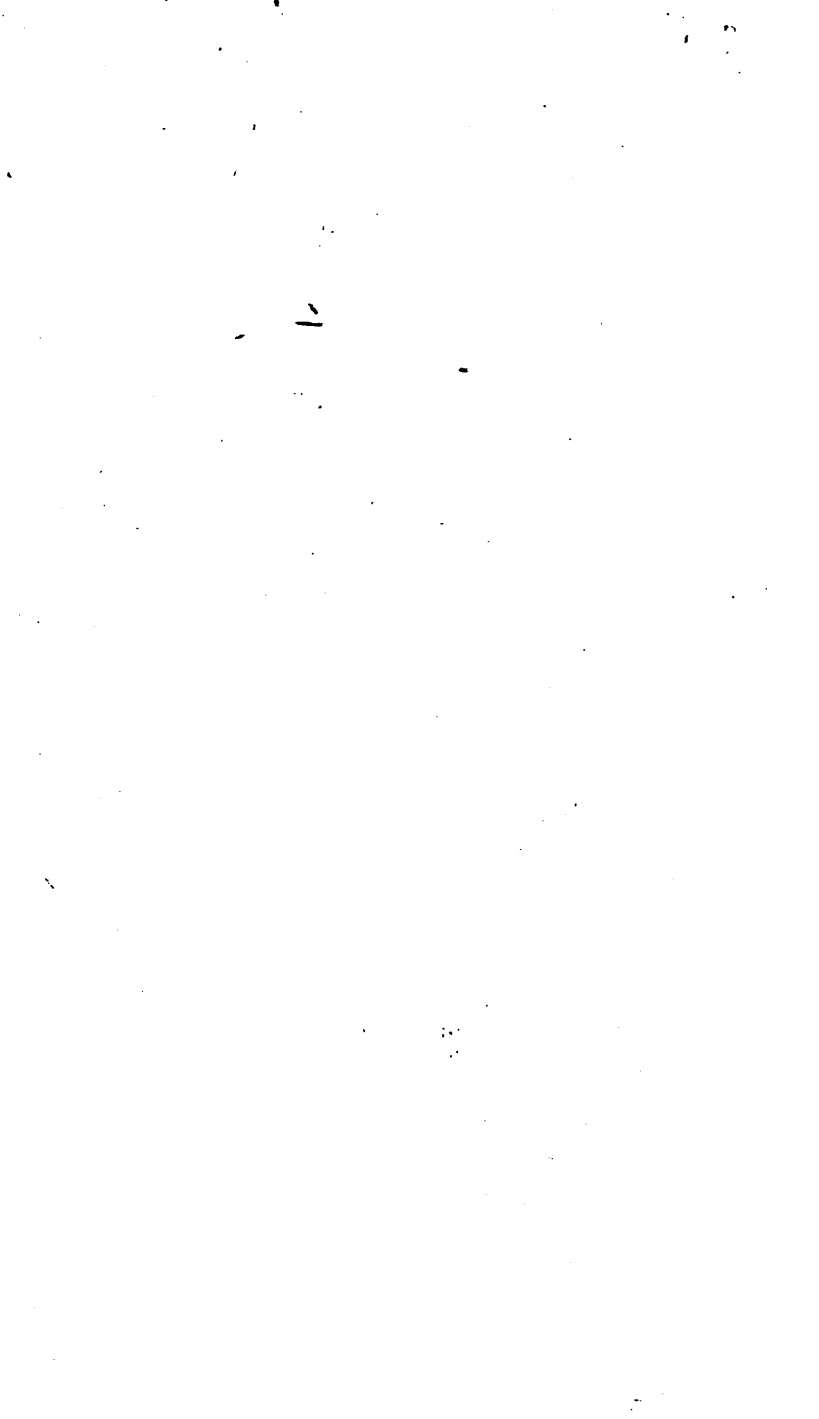


The University of Chicago
Libraries



GIFT OF

Family of E. D. Hulbert



E. B. Hulbert

REGENERATION;

BEING

FIVE DISCOURSES

BY

DANIEL WILSON, D.D., BISHOP OF
CALCUTTA,

DANIEL DE SUPERVILLE,

GEORGE PAYNE, LL.D.,

JOHN CAIRD, D.D.,

R. H. SEELEY.

LONDON:

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY;

56, PATERNOSTER ROW; 65, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD;

AND 164, PICCADILLY:

AND SOLD BY THE BOOKSELLERS.

BT 79

.W 74

Jim

Gift of Family of
E. B. Hulbert

263554

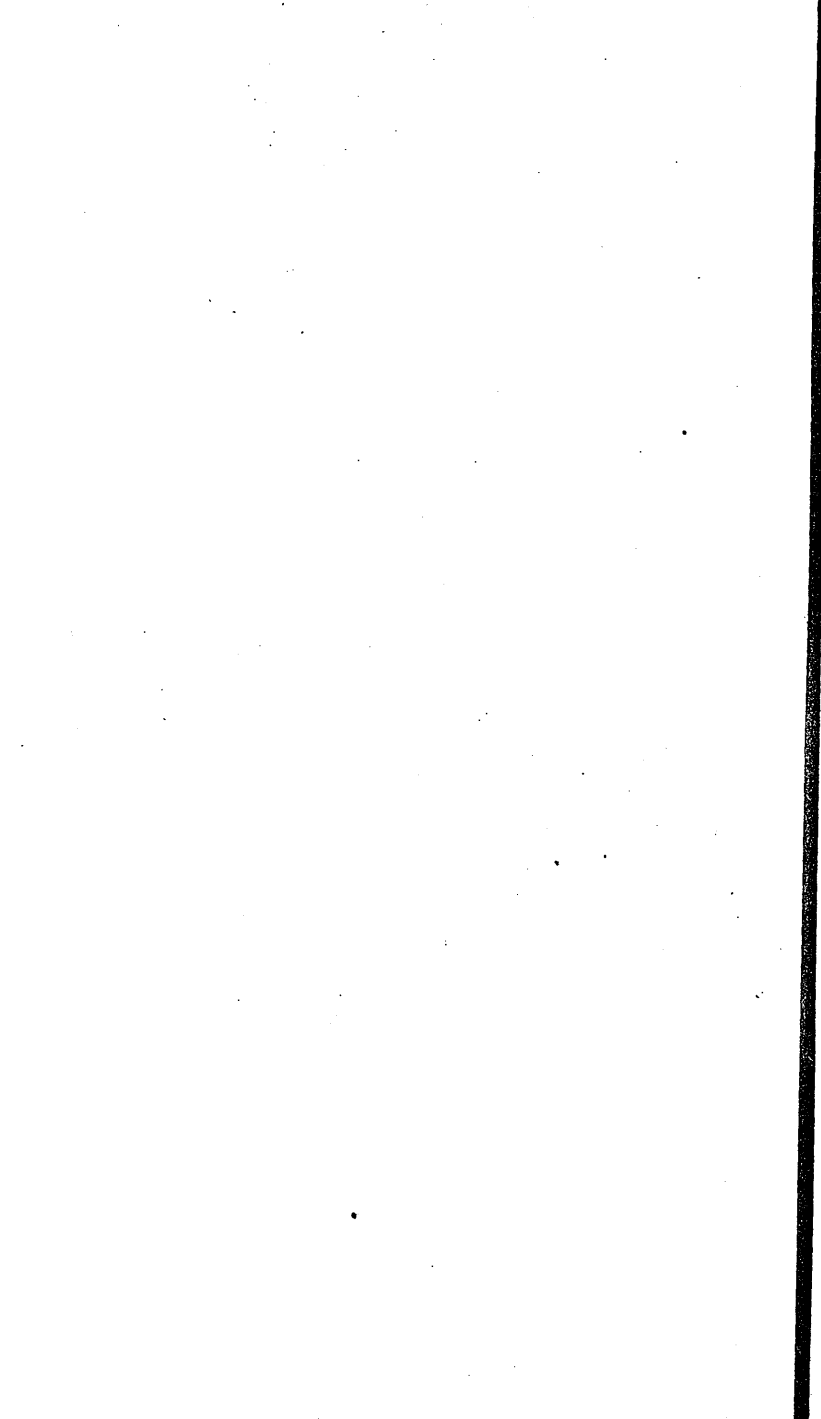
chg

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

A SMALL volume of Sermons on the Atonement having been found acceptable, it has seemed desirable that it be followed by a similar one on Regeneration.

In some of these Sermons a few passages, touching on secondary points in question among evangelical Christians, or on immaterial topics, are omitted.

161327



THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED :

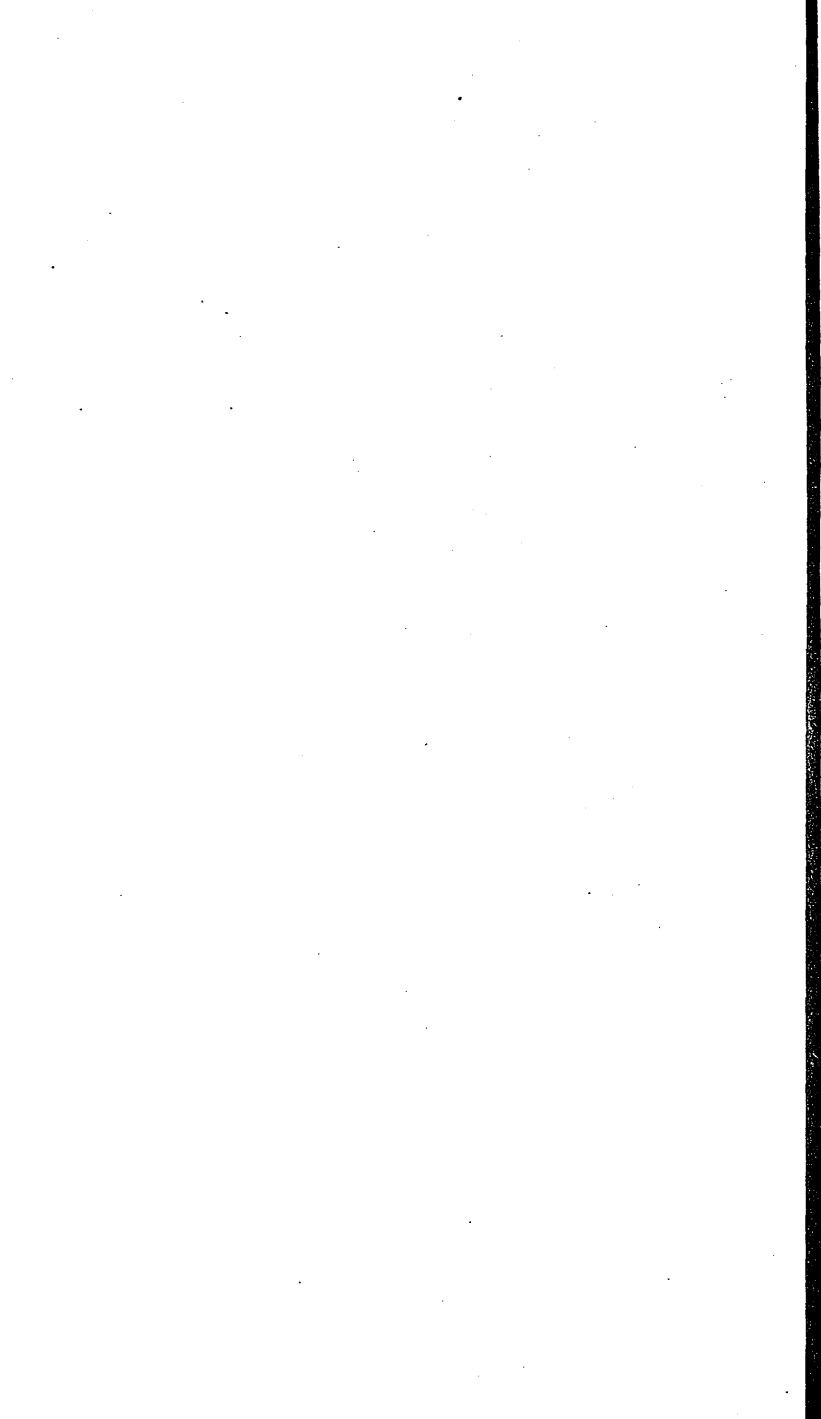
A SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD,

On Monday, February 24, 1817,

BY

DANIEL WILSON, D.D.,

BISHOP OF CALCUTTA.



THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED.

JOHN iii. 6.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

IN the consideration of all questions in practical religion, there will generally be found some fundamental principle to guide us in our inquiries. If this principle be rightly apprehended, smaller difficulties will commonly disappear, or cease materially to embarrass our judgment. We can scarcely, indeed, expect, without a presumption bordering on a claim to infallibility, to escape every error in the determination of any extensive subject. If we wait for this, we shall wait in vain ; but, if we are careful to seize the leading features of truth, as they are drawn in the Holy Scriptures, we shall be successful in the main object of our studies ; we shall be right, where it is most important to be right, in the essential doctrines and duties of Christianity : whereas a contrary course is ordinarily the prelude to disappointment. If we begin our inquiries respecting any of the great doctrines of the gospel, by a precise and minute adjustment of inferior topics ; if we

THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

laboriously occupy ourselves in ascertaining to a nicety the degrees of probability on the one side or the other, in matters of doubtful disputation, whilst we pass slightly over the chief and controlling considerations connected with it, we are not very likely to arrive at a sound decision. Refinements are lost on the great bulk of mankind, and lost upon ourselves. It is by great and energetic principles that the affections of men are moved ; principles which, derived manifestly from the unerring oracles of God, and acting powerfully on the consciences and lives of men, though they leave behind them untouched various points of smaller importance, yet at once gain and sway the heart.

I am aware, indeed, that powerful emotions demand powerful restraints. A greater evil can scarcely be named than that of a heated and turbulent vehemence, which leads a man to disregard the control of prudential considerations, and to follow more his own imaginations than the plain meaning of the written word of God, the standard of every doctrine, and the test of all our professions. It is one of the best consequences of a truly learned ministry, of men trained and formed to honest study, and whose minds are balanced by sound general principles and enlightened piety, that they unite zeal and fervour with meekness and discretion. But still caution will not supply the place of feeling, nor a jealousy of

excesses form a substitute for those grand and master virtues, in which all high exertions take their rise. The ripest scholar, if he be a sincere Christian, will be the first to allow that a cold and systematic hesitation on minute difficulties, to the neglect of those momentous truths which can alone lead to deep and affecting piety of heart, is neither the way of arriving at substantial excellence ourselves, nor of impressing it upon others.

These general observations may perhaps be found of service in any theological question which may engage our attention : they relate to a principle, however, which will, I think, be allowed to be more than ordinarily applicable to the great subject involved in the passage from which my text is taken ; to that spiritual and holy change in all the faculties of fallen man, by which he is to be restored to the moral image of God ; and to the minor questions which are subordinate to it. If there is any point where main and governing principles are to be followed, to the comparative disregard of minute distinctions, it is here ; because, as the change is the spring and commencement of repentance, faith, and obedience to God, rather than those graces themselves ; and, as it regards an interior and secret work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, it must be involved in all the obscurity which hangs over the operations of the human mind, in addition to the still

greater obscurity which rests on the mode in which the Spirit exercises his sacred influences ; and, except as reference is made to its more obvious effects, can only be described and traced out by general and indefinite language. If, therefore, we begin by plain and unembarrassed principles, and understand clearly, and feel deeply, the real corruption of our nature, and the surpassing holiness of God, together with the necessity of the powerful though imperceptible work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, we shall arrive at substantial truth ; whilst, if we first listen to captious objections, and attempt to solve all the difficulties which may present themselves at the outset, we shall be in danger of failing ; we shall be apt to lower the mighty transformation of the heart to our own feeble views, dispose of its real force by some plausible evasion, and probably remain strangers to the substance of the blessing.

It is this conviction which has induced me to touch the present question : in doing which, I do not presume to hope that any thing I may offer will completely solve the speculative difficulties of so extensive a topic : it will be rather my object so to apply the general principle I have laid down to the subject before us, as possibly to open the way, under the blessing of God, for repose and satisfaction as to the practical bearings of the doctrine. I say, under the blessing of God, because it is only by the influences of his

Holy Spirit that we can “think those things that be good.” It appears to me to be impossible that we should understand aright the importance of this subject, if we examine it merely by our natural reason. It is eminently a “thing of the Spirit of God,” which, after all our efforts, will appear as “foolishness” unto us, unless it be “spiritually discerned.”

The great moral change, then, of which our Lord chiefly speaks in the conversation connected with my text, and which is repeatedly inculcated throughout the Scriptures, I consider to be the commencement of sanctification, the incipient principle of that “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord :” it is a spiritual frame or temper in the mind of fallen man, imparted by the Holy Spirit, the infusion of a new life into the heart, before dead in trespasses and sins. It is not a change of the essence of the soul, or the conferring of any new faculties, but a change in the direction and use of those faculties which sin has corrupted ; the re-impressing on man that holy image of God, which he lost by the original transgression. When, therefore, the graces and duties which are the inseparable effects of this change begin to appear, even in the smallest measure, we hope that the transformation under review is commenced : when they attain some consistency, we say, in the judgment of charity, that it has actually taken place ; and, as it shows

itself in growing sanctification, we hesitate not, on the question of the real operation of the Holy Spirit in the change of heart, but transfer our solicitude to the permanency and abundant fruits of the blessing.

Such is the nature of that initial sanctification, on which I purpose to enlarge more particularly. Nor will any material difficulty present itself to us while we dwell upon it, from the more striking circumstances which attended it in the case of the first Christian converts. It will be immediately understood, that this conversion must have been more observable where all the previous habits had been idolatrous or superstitious, and where the hatred to the Christian name at once separated the disciple of Christ from his family and friends. But it will at the same time be recollected, that the broad and leading characteristics of conversion must be always the same. To restore a fallen sinner to the real love and service of God, is ever a work of infinite power. Pride, worldliness, hardness of heart, selfishness, independence of spirit, vanity, anger, revenge, malice, covetousness, sensuality, contempt of God, neglect of the soul and eternity, a death in sin; these various evils, though they may not, for the most part, manifest themselves in effects equally injurious to society, and revolting to natural conscience, are yet essentially the same in a merely nominal Christian, and in one altogether out of

the pale of the Christian faith: whilst humility, hatred of sin, separation from the world, tenderness of conscience, contrition, disinterestedness, modesty, forgiveness of injuries, purity, regard for the soul, repentance, faith, meekness, temperance, are substantially the same evidences of a change of heart now as they were in the days of the apostles.

It is the more necessary to insist on this point, in consequence of the ease with which we are too apt to lose sight of the high and distinctive character and effects of the spiritual life of the soul, in a period of outward tranquillity like the present. The world and the church are now intermingled. The general name of Christian, the ordinary admission of the chief truths of religion, and the more gradual steps by which the transition from a state of sin to a state of spirituality and love to God—vast as that transition is—commonly takes place, expose us to considerable danger. We forget the real religion of the heart. We mistake the form for the power of godliness. The spirituality of true devotion fades from our view in the indistinctness of the prospect. Its vividness and strong outlines disappear; a confused and tame image fills the eye; and decency of conduct, benevolence of disposition, attention to the outward duties of religion, and a reputation for piety, seduce us at times to forget, what must accompany and animate the whole, the abiding

THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

influence of the Holy Spirit; and the fruits of that influence, a real love of holiness, an entire separation from the evils of the world, a genuine delight in Christ Jesus, a glorying in the reproach of his cross, and an ardent contemplation of heaven.

After these preparatory remarks, our way is open to the more full consideration of the supreme importance of the change itself; which will appear from reviewing the energetic description given of it in Scripture, the place it holds in the system of Christianity, and its inseparable connexion with the other doctrines of the gospel.

The various images employed to describe this change in the Holy Scriptures, are eminently calculated to exalt our ideas of its magnitude. Let us contemplate these descriptions in their grand outlines. If the general and entire change of the whole soul is regarded, it is described as a new birth, a new creature, a being awakened from sleep, and quickened from death and the grave. It is even compared to the light and order and beauty educed from the original chaos by the Divine command, and to the resurrection effected by the exceeding greatness of God's power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead. If the governing principle is viewed, it is described as a change of mind, a law inscribed on the heart, a light shining into the soul, an epistle of Christ written by the Spirit

PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED.

of God. If the universal effects of this change are considered, it is represented as a conversion or turning from sin to God, a transformation by the renewing of the mind, a participation of a Divine nature, and a conformity to the image of Christ and of God; it is the wax yielding to the seal, or the metal receiving the impress of the mould. If the more particular consequences of incipient sanctification are exhibited, then the Christian is washed from uncleanness; puts off the old and defiled man, and puts on the new; appears in a wedding garment; casts away the works of darkness, and clothes himself with the armour of light; is crucified to sin; assumes the yoke of his Saviour, and offers himself a living sacrifice to his service. If, again, the course on which he enters is especially regarded, he then becomes a merchant-man seizing the matchless pearl, a disciple at the feet of his master, a servant obeying his lord, a steward occupying with his talents, a soldier contending under his captain, a wrestler labouring in the struggle, and a racer breathless for the prize. If, moreover, the powerful operation of grace in this change is considered, it is then compared to the recovery of the wandering sheep after a painful search, to the healing of an inveterate distemper, the surprise of a fortified castle, or the rescue from the power of a foreign foe. If the outward manner of effecting it, it is a calling to the fellowship of the

THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

gospel ; or, if the gradual and imperceptible influences of the Spirit, it is as a wind blowing where it listeth ; as ground made good and fertile ; as a tree newly receiving the graft, the incorruptible seed taking root, the leaven fermenting the mass, and a well of water springing up to everlasting life.

It is, in a word, to adopt the sentiment of an old divine, a vital principle, which animates every faculty and operation of the soul in respect of God and religion, and may receive various denominations from the various parts of the mind with which it is connected, or the various duties of piety to which it leads. As it appears in the understanding, it is the beginning of the knowledge of God ; as it appears in the will, of the preference of the commands of God ; as it appears in the affections, of sorrow for sin and desire of the favour of God. As it embraces Christ, it is incipient faith ; as it rejoices in Christ, it is love ; as it lies at the feet of Christ, it is humility ; as it observes the will of Christ, it is obedience ; as it shares with submission the afflictions of Christ, it is patience ; as it regards the majesty of Christ, it is fear. Yet all these arise from one vital principle, which, extending itself through the whole man, constitutes, not one separate grace, but that which comprehends the rudiments of them all—an entire and universal change of heart.

This description, which includes in it such an

accumulation of figures, is surely sufficient in its plain and obvious meaning to penetrate the mind with the magnitude and importance of this radical change of nature. For, if all this variety of metaphor signify merely that a man may become deeply pious and spiritual, with only some slight and external improvement; that habit, and education, and instruction, with the occasional assistance of the Holy Spirit, are adequate, or nearly adequate, of themselves to this end; then we must allow that the language of Scripture is forced and unnatural; and that a very simple meaning is conveyed under a load of strong expressions, which overwhelms, rather than exhibits, the sense; a supposition the more inadmissible, because the Scripture, on every other occasion, even when it would develop the mysteries of redemption, or paint the glories of heaven, is remarkable for extraordinary sublimity indeed in the things described, but for unparalleled simplicity in the language in which it describes them. But if the thing here spoken of is also great and sublime, if this inward reformation of the soul be mighty and universal, a change far above the ordinary notices of reason, and which, whilst it embraces amendment of the outward conduct, and is ordinarily effected in the use of the various appointed means of instruction, demands also a principle and spring of life in the heart; rises above all the impressions and dictates of nature,

and unites man again to God; makes religion our delight as well as our duty, and gives a choice and freedom in the pursuit of it;—then the language we have detailed is natural and intelligible; then, instead of surpassing the dignity of the change, no images can reach it; then, the things spoken of here, as elsewhere, are deep and mysterious, but the terms are simple and appropriate; then our concern is to rise with the help they afford, to the grandeur of our heavenly calling, and, neglecting minor points, to imbibe the main purport and sentiment of the infallible word of God.

We shall be the more impressed with the paramount importance of this subject, if we bear in mind, in the next place, the rank which the general doctrine of a change of heart, thus emphatically described in Scripture, holds in the system of Christianity. Our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus—one of the most solemn discourses in the whole of our Saviour's ministry; a discourse with a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a master of Israel, one convinced of our Lord's Divine mission, and evidently desirous of instruction—is an eminent instance in point. It will, however, confirm us in the view which we are now taking of the importance of this inward renewal, to point out its connexion with the other essential truths of revelation. Because, if we should discover that the other doctrines of

the gospel necessarily require this one in order to render them complete, and that, so far from standing by itself as an insulated doctrine, it is harmoniously accordant with them all, then the conclusions which we have drawn from the preceding separate considerations will be obviously strengthened and confirmed.

The greatness of this spiritual renovation, then, naturally arises from the scriptural statement of the corruption of man. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are only evil continually; he is born in sin, and shapen in iniquity; his heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." If this, then, be the state of man; if, in other words, according to the ninth Article of the Church of England, he be "very far gone from original righteousness, and be of his own nature inclined to evil;" and if "the condition of man since the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot prepare and turn himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God;" then the alteration must be great indeed, by which he begins really to delight in God, and to adore and love his Saviour. It is no slight improvement which will suffice to restore him to holiness, because it is no slight corruption with which he is tainted. He needs a radical change. Whatever

THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

and unites man again to God; makes religion our delight as well as our duty, and gives a choice and freedom in the pursuit of it;—then the language we have detailed is natural and intelligible; then, instead of surpassing the dignity of the change, no images can reach it; then, the things spoken of here, as elsewhere, are deep and mysterious, but the terms are simple and appropriate; then our concern is to rise with the help they afford, to the grandeur of our heavenly calling, and, neglecting minor points, to imbibe the main purport and sentiment of the infallible word of God.

We shall be the more impressed with the paramount importance of this subject, if we bear in mind, in the next place, the rank which the general doctrine of a change of heart, thus emphatically described in Scripture, holds in the system of Christianity. Our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus—one of the most solemn discourses in the whole of our Saviour's ministry; a discourse with a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a master of Israel, one convinced of our Lord's Divine mission, and evidently desirous of instruction—is an eminent instance in point. It will, however, confirm us in the view which we are now taking of the importance of this inward renewal, to point out its connexion with the other essential truths of revelation. Because, if we should discover that the other doctrines of

PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED.

the gospel necessarily require this one in order to render them complete, and that, so far from standing by itself as an insulated doctrine, it is harmoniously accordant with them all, then the conclusions which we have drawn from the preceding separate considerations will be obviously strengthened and confirmed.

The greatness of this spiritual renovation, then, naturally arises from the scriptural statement of the corruption of man. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are only evil continually; he is born in sin, and shapen in iniquity; his heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." If this, then, be the state of man; if, in other words, according to the ninth Article of the Church of England, he be "very far gone from original righteousness, and be of his own nature inclined to evil;" and if "the condition of man since the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot prepare and turn himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God;" then the alteration must be great indeed, by which he begins really to delight in God, and to adore and love his Saviour. It is no slight improvement which will suffice to restore him to holiness, because it is no slight corruption with which he is tainted. He needs a radical change. Whatever

THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

light may be left in the understanding, or however the natural conscience may be capable of being informed by instruction or aroused by danger, still, as to all effectual efforts, man is "dead in trespasses and sins;" and can only know and love God, as he is "transformed by the renewing of his mind." The whole question unfolds itself here. The real state of our fallen nature involves every other topic, and this among the rest. If this corruption is once fairly admitted as set forth in Scripture, and deeply felt as agreeing with the painful and daily conviction of experience, a commanding position is gained. The penitent inquirer will at once see the magnitude of that correspondent renewal of all the faculties of man which such a state demands.

The infinite holiness of the Divine character will serve also to raise our conceptions of the great subject we are considering. Who can stand before the inconceivable majesty of God under the defilements of sin? His holiness is his glory. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. The very angels are "charged by him with folly, and the heavens are not clean in his sight." How then can man approach him without a holy state of heart? If, indeed, we "think wickedly, that God is even such an one as ourselves," our conceptions of this work of the Holy Spirit will proportionably sink. But if we contemplate him as the King eternal, immortal, invisible, before

whom the seraphim veil their faces, and cry with ceaseless adoration, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts," we shall fall speechless before him in shame and confusion, and shall learn to appreciate that great change by which God condescends to renew a creature so lost as man, to reimpress upon him his spotless image, and thus to prepare him for his service.

But the stupendous mysteries of redemption place the importance of this subject in a still stronger light. The religion of the Bible addresses man as a sinner. It is a religion through a Mediator, and that Mediator the Son of God, the great High Priest; "who, having purged our sins by his own blood, has entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." It begins with requiring subjection to him in all the several characters in which he is revealed. The pride and self-confidence of our fallen hearts must be subjugated, if we would be true Christians; and we must renounce our "own righteousness, which is of the law," that we may welcome and glory in "the righteousness which is of God by faith." We must also have the mind which was in Christ, rejoice in his salvation, be governed by his love, do all things in his name, and ascribe whatever we perform that is good to his grace. The change, therefore, which is the commencement of all this, must be no trifling one. It must penetrate and

renew every faculty of the soul. Whenever the necessity of it is undervalued, the glory of the Saviour fades from our view. Our religion is in danger of becoming little more than a merely natural religion; and although there may be a formal denial of scarcely any one article of our faith, nay, though there be a readiness speculatively to assert and maintain nearly all of them, yet it is no longer the practical religion of the Bible, actually founded on the sacrifice and animated with the grace of Jesus Christ. Living faith in that Saviour, love to him, and a delight in speaking of his mercy and copying his example, must be the fruit of a new nature. When this begins to take place, all is practicable in religion. Then, and then only, the glowing language of the apostles relating to Christ, is not interpreted away by a frigid gloss, nor merely admitted with a general acquiescence, but understood and welcomed as the natural and appropriate utterance of enlarged gratitude and love.

And if these considerations tend to heighten our conceptions of this spiritual transformation, what must we think of it, when we contemplate the glory and purity of heaven? To enter that blest abode, we must first partake of that entire work of the Holy Spirit, which prepares for it. There God will be adored in ceaseless acts of willing worship. There the songs of praise to the Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to

God by his blood, will for ever sound. There all will be peace, and repose, and spotless joy. To consider heaven chiefly as an exemption from punishment, or as a surprising elevation of dignity and glory, or even as the mere enjoyment of a refined intellectual pleasure, is to know little of its real nature. Holiness will be its element and its felicity. It would afford no joy to an un-renewed heart, even if it were possible that it should enter there. A paradise, approaching in its nature to that depicted by the Arabian impostor, may afford some repose to the expectations of a sensual mind ; but the rest which remaineth for the people of God is of another kind. It is to bring us, in the fullest sense of the terms, to "Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." And what that change of heart must be, which is to constitute the meetness for this consummation, I will not stop to inquire. I will only say, that if of all these glories it is not possible to speak with adequate fervour, then we can never conceive highly enough of that transformation by which the grace of God must qualify us for them.*

* The length to which the argument of my discourse

I have pressed these various points with the greater earnestness, because they are calculated to exhibit, in a striking point of view, the nature of this great incipient work of the Spirit. If the student, instead of seizing at once the grand substance of truth in this respect, languish in hesitation; if he listen to the treacherous subtlety of his own heart, or lose himself among the objections of a sickly imagination; if he consult a luxurious and corrupted world, or lend himself to those who confound fervour with intemperance, and the most sober and enlightened piety, if it be spiritual and energetic, with enthusiasm; or if he dispose of every thing with an indolent carelessness, and sink the chief force of the great truth before us, in the outward transition from heathen or Mohammedan superstition to the profession of the Christian faith, it is impossible for him to succeed. Truth was never attained by such a method: he is not in a position to survey the extensive field: he wants the state of heart re-

led me, made it impracticable to notice those counteracting principles which arise in the actual lives and feelings of the best Christians, from the remaining force of sinful dispositions, combined with the temptations presented to them by the world and their other spiritual enemies. My object was to exhibit the magnitude of a real spiritual change in all the faculties of the soul, not in opposition to the large allowances to be ever made for human infirmity, but to the statements which would lower, and, in my mind, almost annihilate the characteristics of the change itself.

quisite to a right decision. Whereas, if the main question be first felt and understood, and the supreme magnitude and importance of a change of heart be adequately known, no material difficulties will rest on his mind. Being right in his leading principles, subordinate points will either lose their importance, or assume nearly their appropriate place.

In order to this, however, there are two additional considerations, which, in attending to these inferior questions, he will bear in mind. He will remember that the dispensation of the gospel consists not, like the law, in divers washings and purifications of the flesh, but in "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Whilst, therefore, he will conscientiously assign to outward rites their due importance, he will remember that they derive all their value from the spirituality of the affections which they are designed to assist, and that, if that spirituality is wanting, they are utterly worthless before God.

He will likewise not fail to consider the extreme proneness of man, under every dispensation, to lean to external services, instead of surrendering his heart and life to God. Various circumstances tend to render this compromise easy to nature, and indeed peculiarly flattering and

seductive. He will allow in the fullest sense the necessity of a high reverence for the institutions of our Saviour; but he will perceive still more forcibly the importance of governing principles, and will therefore dispose of such minor difficulties as he must resolve, rather on the side of spiritual and vital religion, than of external ceremony or discipline.

Having thus traced the grand outlines of this radical and universal change of heart, I trust that, according to the principle which I began by laying down, the way is now prepared to the more easy consideration of a subordinate question; to attempt to throw some light on the subject of Christian baptism, so far as it is involved in the great practical topic to which our attention has been directed.

For, after the view which we have taken of the subject, some at least of the chief difficulties in which it is involved will probably, I conceive, be lessened, if not removed. It is acknowledged that adults coming to baptism rightly, come with previous repentance and faith; that is, they come with the spiritual life which we have been considering already imparted; and on their profession before the church, they receive, in the sacrament of baptism, a confirmation of faith, an increase of grace, an ingrafting into the visible body of Christ, and a sign and seal of the promises of the gospel. On this question no embarrass-

ment seems to rest. For, on the supposition which the church charitably, and indeed necessarily makes, of the sincerity of the parties concerned, the case stands clear and intelligible. They cannot afterwards need the entire change of nature which they already possess; whilst, if the parties come, as in the instance of Simon Magus, in hypocrisy and guile, they of necessity still want that inward and spiritual change, and must have it, or perish. I am not aware of any material difficulty here.

In the case of infants, also, it is, I believe, admitted on all hands; or if it be not, I would, for the present, venture to assume the fact, that whatever imperceptible disposition to piety they may be supposed by some universally to receive, they do not universally receive in baptism an entire change in all the faculties of their souls. I say, I venture to assume this, because I believe it is granted by all, and because, obviously, where a radical and total transformation of the heart takes place, reason, as well as Scripture, must be considered as teaching us that it will necessarily appear, with the opening powers, in its proper fruits—a prevailing love of God and delight in holiness. The question, then, resolves itself into a plain matter of fact. If the infant, as the faculties of reason and understanding are unfolded, display a spiritual frame and temper of mind, according to the holy image of God, the case is

decided ; he needs not the blessing which we no longer merely hope that he has received, but which we rejoice to discern in its obvious effects. But if, as he advances in age, he appears to be utterly void of spiritual knowledge and spiritual obedience, he evidently still needs, as in the instance of the adult void of true piety, this inward renewal in all his powers, in order to serve and love his Saviour. However men may differ as to the magnitude of the change required, I know not that there is any dispute as to the necessity, in such a case, of conversion to God. Nor is this appeal to the plain truth of things materially affected by the various difficulties attendant upon subordinate questions. What is the measure of spiritual grace conveyed to the baptized infant ; whether it be universally conferred or not ; and how frequently and early it may be lost, are points not necessarily involved in the present argument. Let charity have its utmost bounds. But if it be too evident that the rising youth, from whatever cause, is living in profligacy and vice, in worldliness and pride, in hatred of religion and neglect of his soul, it will be admitted, I believe, by all, that he must be converted and changed before he can love God and delight in holy obedience. The case, in its prominent features, still remains clear : a radical alteration of heart and life is indispensable to fallen man : the young person, in point of fact, wants this, and

must have it in order to be saved. This is a statement which for the most part, I conceive, will not be disputed.

Nor do I entertain a doubt that the same commanding view of the subject has a tendency to lead us to the conclusion, that the terms regeneration and new birth may be applied, without impropriety, to this radical and universal change of nature, under whatever circumstances it may commence. At least, a comprehensive view of the incalculable importance of a spiritual and radical change of the heart would rather seem to justify the use of this distinct and unambiguous, and to some persons even startling language, on such a fundamental point. This part of the argument, however, appears to receive considerable countenance from the general tenor of Scripture. For, of numerous passages which speak of the new birth, only two seem to me to refer at all to the sacrament of baptism,* and those in a way which by no means explicitly states the connexion between them; whilst in the various histories of persons baptized in the New Testament, not one case that I am aware of occurs in which any mention is made of attendant regeneration. Such passages, moreover, as the following, appear fully to confirm my statement: "Of his own will begat he us with the

* John iii. 5. Titus iii. 5.

THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

word of truth. Who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God. He that doeth righteousness is born of God. Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God. In Christ Jesus I have begotten you, through the gospel. As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." These passages speak of the new birth independently of baptism, assign it to other causes, and point out other evidences of it besides the administration of the rite; and therefore lead confessedly to our conclusion, that this change, under whatever circumstances it take place, may and ought to be called by the scriptural term regeneration or new birth.

Nay, more; when we consider the magnitude of that change in all the faculties of the soul, which we have before described, in connexion with the actual character, in every period of life, of the vast majority of those who have been baptized, must not this one consideration forbid us to suppose that regeneration is invariably connected with baptism? For myself, at least, I must dis-

tinctly avow that this one consideration, independently of other numerous, and in my mind conclusive arguments on the subject, is abundantly sufficient to prevent my entertaining for a moment such a supposition. And on this ground, not only the propriety, but the necessity of the use of the term which I am now maintaining, seems to me at once and undeniably to follow.

Nor do I conceive that I shall justly incur the charge of uncharitableness, if I venture to inquire, whether the reasons which cause some at least to differ from this view of the subject, and to contend that regeneration and the new birth are never to be spoken of as distinct from the sacrament of baptism, may not, in a great degree, be resolved into what I must consider a most inadequate conception of the nature of the inward renewal of the heart itself? Do they not object to the simple and scriptural application of these words, because they object to the strong language in which the radical recovery of man is delineated, and to the incalculable moment which is ascribed to it? Do they not object to them, in common with many similar or nearly similar figures, by which this inward life of God in the soul is represented and enforced? Would they not be disposed to wave their objections, if these particular words were employed in a sense agreeable to their own view of a change of heart; and persevere in

them if, abandoning the mere words, the same degree of spiritual and vital religion were enforced under any other? Indeed, is it not natural and almost necessary, that, as they take an incomparably lower view of this inward change itself, they should protest against a separation between it and the external rite? And is not this the main reason why such a separation is represented by them as forced and extravagant? I must be allowed at least to state my conviction, that the strong and vivid conception of what the commencement of real and universal religion is, forms a most important pre-requisite to the conclusions which I am endeavouring to establish; and that it is not, in the great majority of cases, a mere term which is in dispute, but the decision of the nature and importance of that incipient transformation of man, on which all religion rests, and which has ever been a main topic of controversy between the worldly and spiritual members of the visible church of Christ.

To enter, therefore, aright into the whole question, we must recur to the greatness and importance of the conversion of the heart to God, by the work of his Holy Spirit. We must seize this truth in its prominent features, and we must allow it to sway us in our consideration of subordinate disputations connected with it. We must begin, not with its attendant difficulties and distinctions, and then attempt to form a correct

judgment of the mighty and general doctrine; but with the powerful and universal principle first, and then make our way through the perplexities of minor details. The heart must be affected, ere the understanding can determine aright. We shall then assuredly incline, not to the side which would lower the duty of man and the operations of Divine grace, but to that which would exalt them both.

And, indeed, may I not, in drawing to a conclusion, venture to leave the decision of the subject, when placed on this practical and for the most part uncontroverted footing, to the heart and conscience of every serious Christian? Do we not find in our own cases the extreme backwardness of the human heart to practical religion? Do we not find the difficulty, the pressing difficulty, of overcoming the world, of loving God, of believing from the heart in the alone merits and righteousness of Christ, of delighting in prayer and contemplating heaven? Is it not a difficult thing to crucify the flesh, to mortify our passions, and obey the calls of duty? Is not spiritual religion, that is, a vital, holy, constant service and love of God, a hard, I had almost said, an impracticable attempt? Do we not find—I put the question as in the presence of God—that external duties and our familiar intercourse with sacred topics, so far from elevating the mind to devotion and the love of Christ, soon allow it to decline

into a lifeless acquiescence? Is it not a fact that the researches of science and the fascinations of human learning, however important in their proper sphere, have a tendency to nourish pride and vain reasonings, against inward and spiritual religion? Have not our resolutions failed? Do not our good intentions remain frustrated? And are we not at this moment, perhaps, far from acting up to the convictions of our minds and the dictates of conscience?

Is it not then possible, waving all the minuter points of controversy, that some of us, without being aware of our danger, have not taken a right view of the real magnitude of a change of nature? Is it not at least possible that if we felt more deeply our depravity, and estimated more highly the work of the Holy Ghost in changing the heart, we might be more successful in our religious course? Would not a new disposition and frame of soul go to the bottom of the case? Would it not supply the very thing which is wanting? Do not great and controlling principles govern the human mind? And is it not most likely that a master-spring within—a new principle of life and holiness, would lead to the very success we now want? And may it not then be our wisest course to omit smaller matters of dispute, at least till the governing truths of the gospel have more entirely filled our souls, and in humble supplication we have implored

with greater earnestness the illumination of the blessed Spirit of God? And are we not most likely to arrive at the grand and substantial principle, really involved in the great question under review, by this plain and practical method, in a matter which confessedly depends more on the state of the heart than on the cold deductions of abstract reasoning?

This conclusion may be strengthened by a reference to the state of the several flocks intrusted to our care. For does not the whole success of our ministry bear some proportion to our strong apprehension of the spiritual change of all the faculties of man? If we plainly call on those who are living in sin and neglect of serious piety, to repent and turn to God: if we tell them faithfully of the depravity of their nature, and of the necessity of an entire transformation into the image of Christ, and direct them to judge by the fruits of faith, love, and other graces, whether they have been really regenerated and born of God, may we not hope that a divine efficacy will attend our ministry? Does not God bless these and other doctrines of his word to the conversion of sinners? Are not men reformed by means of them, from habits of vice and sensuality, of malice and pride, of vanity and worldliness, and brought to the love and service of Christ? May not the effect produced be justly represented as an awakening from sleep, a resurrection from the

dead, a birth to spiritual life? Is not, in fact, what was in too many cases wanting, obviously wanting, in the effects of the baptismal ordinance, then, and then only, made up and supplied?

On the contrary, does not a train of instruction, which, arising from inadequate views of this regeneration, addresses men indiscriminately as already true Christians, and exhorts them only to further degrees of amendment, leave them in a great measure careless and unimpressed? Do not the worldly and luxurious, the proud and covetous, the profane and prejudiced, those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, being flattered with high statements of their baptismal privileges, and hearing little of a broad division of men into "righteous and wicked, those who serve God and those who serve him not," and being never plainly told what a stupendous thing a real change of nature is, nor directed to implore the regenerating influences of the Holy Ghost, but being treated as already born of God, and needing only further sanctification; and hearing besides frequent cautions against excess in religion, and the danger of enthusiasm,—will not, I say, such persons be insensibly led to conclude that their state is upon the whole good, and that, with a little reformation, they may, through the merits of Christ, fulfil the conditions of the gospel covenant?

Is it not then, to say the very least, the safest plan to adhere to the prominent and plain track of Scripture; and, leaving points of subordinate difficulty, to dwell in our own minds and in our instructions to others on the main and intelligible features of the regeneration by God's Holy Spirit? Will not this give us the greatest security of discharging our duty in the best manner towards God and towards the souls of men? Will not all inferior questions sink into comparative insignificance, if we begin with plainly urging, in the first instance, on every child of Adam, whatever may be his external privileges, if he is living in irreligion and impiety, the indispensable necessity of a new and spiritual birth, of an actual and complete transformation of the whole man after the image of God? And will not a learned and enlightened ministry be then most likely at once to control the real disorders of enthusiasm, to bring down on their labours the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and to lay the foundation of true scriptural piety, when by such a "manifestation of the truth they commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God?"



THE NEW CREATURE;

OR, THE

NECESSITY OF REGENERATION TO
CONSTITUTE A CHRISTIAN

BY

DANIEL DE SUPERVILLE,

FORMERLY PASTOR OF THE FRENCH CHURCH AT ROTTERDAM.



THE NEW CREATURE.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 17.

“ If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”

MAN is fond of change and of new objects. No inclination seems more natural than this. We are almost always certain of pleasing, when we present a person anything new; and without novelty pleasures grow insipid, and riches burdensome; the most delicate fare is no longer relished; honours and royalties, praises and glory itself, at last become tedious. Spectacles and entertainments, music and festivals, pictures and statues, pomps and palaces; in a word, all that is most fascinating to the senses commonly loses part of its value in the estimation of persons accustomed to its enjoyment, who can say, This is old, it is always the same thing.

In that perpetual desire of change, that love of novelty which so commonly predominates among men, while it cannot be denied that there is much caprice and extravagance, it may also be observed

that there is something natural and necessary. The imperfection of the senses and imagination, the disquietude of the heart and mind, the vast extent of the desires, and the nature of the soul, which seeks the supreme good, and never finds it in the creatures, form the true source of that love of change and of novelty. Not being in a state of happiness and perfection, it is natural, and in some sense reasonable, that we should love to change, and should seek what we do not yet possess. But let us turn this inclination to the right side ; let us make good use of a propensity which is generally excessive, irregular, and productive of no real advantage when it leads us to seek novelty merely in the objects of sense and in human science. Let us by all means love change and renovation ; but let it be in our manners and habits. “ Behold, all things are become new ” by the gospel. Grace promises a thousand new blessings of which we have no knowledge, or of which our conceptions are yet very imperfect : glory reserves for us a thousand others. Let those blessings be the objects of our pursuit. Ah, brethren, if novelty is capable of exciting your desires, you may find it in Jesus Christ, in communion with him, and the enjoyment of his benefits. Here are the new heavens and the new earth ; here the new covenant, new ages, the new Jerusalem, a new course of years, and the new man. Believers, if you have the last, you will have

all the rest ; if you are become new creatures, you will possess blessings and pleasures ever new in the kingdom of heaven ; and if you are true Christians, to renew yourselves from day to day must be your grand and perpetual aim. Now, therefore, let “old things” pass away with respect to us ; let us “put off the old man with his deeds,”* and commence a new life. To this St. Paul exhorts us when he says, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”

To give you all the assistance we can in this work, we shall examine these things in the text : First, What it is to be “in Christ ;” and secondly, What it is to be “a new creature.” These shall be the heads of our discourse. God grant that it may be efficacious for our sanctification and salvation. Amen.

I. What it is to be in Christ.

Everything in our text is new, the terms and the subject itself. The terms, to be “in Christ,” to be a “new creature,” are not expressions common in the language of men ; they are modes of speaking peculiar to the language of Canaan and the style of the Holy Spirit. In the world a person is said to be with or for any one, to denote attachment, union, or dependence. But neither the disciples of philosophers, nor the servants of princes, nor the followers of any religion, ever boasted of being in their master. It must be

* Col. iii. 9.

THE NEW CREATURE.

acknowledged also that the thing is new; the connexion of Christians with Jesus Christ is of a different nature from the common connexions and relations between men. Regeneration, which the Scripture designates by the term new creature, is likewise a change unknown among the men of the world. Thus new mysteries require new expressions; and new words are necessary to convey new ideas.

What is intended, then, by “being in Jesus Christ?” It signifies to be a Christian: to be a true Christian; to be in the church of Christ by a profession of his doctrine; to enjoy internal communion with Christ by grace; to live in the faith of Christ; to be in him as the principle of life, and intimately united to him by a vivifying and saving union.

To be in Christ, signifies more than to be a Christian in general. The force of the phrase imports, to be a true Christian—a Christian in reality, and not merely in name; a Christian united to Jesus Christ by a real, spiritual, mystical, vivifying union. To gain a clear apprehension of this subject, compare this expression with others which may elucidate it. We say, for example, that the members are in the body, meaning that they are united to it, that they constitute a part of it, that the same spirit, the same life, animates the whole body and every particular member. Thus are the faithful in Jesus

THE NEW CREATURE.

Christ; they are all united to him, to form with him one mystical body. They are "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."* They live one and the same life: they are animated by one and the same Spirit, which proceeds from the Saviour. The branches live less in the root which bears them than the believer lives in Jesus, from whom he receives the life of grace, and nourishment and influence by the participation of his Spirit, which is communicated from him to us. We are in Jesus Christ.

By nature, we may be said to be in Adam. He is the principle of our life, the stock and root of human kind, the parent from whom we derived our origin, and who carried us all in his loins. We were in him when God placed him in the garden of Eden, and made a covenant with him for himself and all his posterity. We were in him when he sinned; he represented us all; he became subject to death, and we with him. "In Adam all die;"† from him we derive our old man, our corrupt nature, and, with it, liableness to wrath and condemnation. But by grace we are in Christ. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ" all are "made alive." We are in him as the source of our new being, as our head who has represented us and given us all that we have of spiritual life. Happy participation of nature, widely different from the first! Happy union, by which we be-

* Eph. v. 30.

† 1 Cor. xv. 22.

come one with Christ. We abide in Christ, and Christ abides in us. How is this effected? In the same way. "Christ is in us; we are in Christ." These are two reciprocal things, which suppose each other, and which arise from certain mutual acts on our part, and on that of our Saviour. On our part, from our faith, our obedience, and our love; an habitual obedience, love, and faith, which connect and incorporate us with Jesus. "I live; yet not I: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* On the part of Christ, this union arises from his love to us, and the inhabitation of his Spirit within us. That Spirit transforms us into his very image, and makes us one spirit with him.

How great are the miracles of grace! See, Christians, what a happy exchange Jesus Christ has made with you. He took your nature by his incarnation; and he makes you partakers of his, by regeneration. By the incarnation he became "Emmanuel, God with us;"† he "dwelt among us;" "our humanity was the tabernacle of his Divinity;" and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."‡ But by regeneration and the union of his Spirit with our souls, we become "an

* Gal. ii. 20.

† Matthew i. 23.

‡ John i. 14.

habitation of God through the Spirit;”* we are exalted to the dignity of “sons of God;”† we become one body with our head; we are “in Christ.”

The Saviour in these two different mysteries may be compared to the sun united, if I may use the expression, with a cloud. When that luminary meets with a thick cloud, he sometimes sinks in it, is concealed and buried in such a manner that his light is almost all absorbed. At another time, that sun shining on a cloud dissipates its grosser parts, and so completely penetrates it, as to make it altogether luminous; and sometimes he even imprints his image upon it, forming a parhelion, another sun. This very much resembles what takes place in the incarnation and in regeneration. In the first of these adorable mysteries, Jesus Christ was united with the cloud by hiding himself in it; he buried himself, as it were, in our nature, which he assumed, with all its guiltless infirmities; and during the days of his flesh, the cloud veiled and covered a part of the splendour of our sun. But in our regeneration, Christ darts his rays upon us; he penetrates us with his vivid lustre, in a manner which gloriously triumphs over all our darkness; he renders us so many parhelia; he imparts to us his image and character. Hence

* Eph. ii. 22.

† 1 John iii. 2.

we become, as it were, other men ; for “ if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”

The economy of nature is different from that of grace. By nature, the head in whom we properly subsist is God. We are in God, “ for in him we live, and move, and have our being ;” we depend on him for our first creation, and for our preservation. His concurrence and perpetual influence are absolutely necessary to our living, moving, and acting. Independently of God, nothing exists. If God should for a moment withdraw his influence, we must perish. If he “ hides ” his “ face,” all creatures “ are troubled.” * But this kind of natural union and dependence, by which we may be said to subsist in God, as our supporter and preserver, avails us only for simple existence, and for life and motion in the capacity of creatures. We need, since we are sinners, a new subsistence, another kind of union, by which we may live in a new head. This head is Jesus Christ, whom God has appointed in the economy of grace, to be to the faithful the source of spiritual life and motion. By nature we are in God, because God communicates himself immediately to the creatures without the intervention of a third person to preserve them in their existence and functions. But by grace we are in Jesus Christ, because he is the medium and channel by which God imparts to his faithful people the spiritual life

* Psalm civ. 29.

THE NEW CREATURE.

and all the blessings it includes. God has not been pleased to communicate those blessings immediately without the intervention of a third person; because men being sinners in themselves, his justice and holiness opposed his having any communion with them without the interposition of a Mediator. But when that Mediator has united us to himself, when our faith has engrafted us into him, and we constitute, as it were, only one complete body with him, then we are in a state of acceptance with God. Thus, in the economy of grace, it is necessary that we should be in Christ; every true believer is in him, and it is by this union that he becomes a new creature, according to the assertion of St. Paul, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Let us examine the meaning of this second expression in our text.

II. What it is to be a new creature.

I remark, in the first place, that the language is figurative. Ask not with Nicodemus, "Can a man enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"* Can a man be formed over again a second time of different materials? To become holy, is it necessary that the constitution, the substance, the essence of our nature be changed? Certainly not. The change which grace produces in us is moral, and not physical or natural. It is a renovation of the qualities and

* John iii. 4.

habitudes of the soul, and not a transmutation of its substance. When Christ converted the water into wine, when the rod of Moses became a serpent, the very nature of those things was changed. But when the sinner becomes righteous; when the infidel becomes a believer; when the libertine becomes sober, temperate, religious, the soul only changes its habitudes, moral qualities, inclinations, and ends. The constitution of our nature comes from God. To be capable of knowing, thinking, and willing, this is the essence of the soul, and this is good. None but the Manicheans condemn the work of the Creator. If a theologian of the last century seems to have imagined that in regeneration there was some change of substance, I know not what introduction of a new substantial form; if some ignorant Jews have fancied that proselytes at their conversion acquired entirely new flesh, just as Naaman did when he was cured of his leprosy; such extravagant notions can find few or no advocates in the present age.

The expressions of Scripture ought not to be stretched beyond their intention. When it speaks of "the new man," and "a new creature," it designates a great change indeed—a change which is supernatural and produced by a Divine principle; but which makes no alteration in the substance of man or the nature of his faculties.

THE NEW CREATURE.

Christians, you have nothing to dread here ; you need not inquire of Jesus, as the demons did, “ Art thou come to destroy us ? ” * He is come only to “ destroy the works of the devil. ” † In giving you a new nature, he will deprive you of nothing that is good in the first ; he will only repair the breaches which Satan has made in your soul ; he will only rebuild and purify that temple of the Deity which sin has profaned. He endues you with knowledge instead of ignorance, holiness in the place of iniquity, and the love of God instead of that of the creatures. He gives you thoughts and desires, affections and habits, more exalted and holy than you had before. Happy change, which far from destroying our nature, perfects and ennobles it ! This change the Scripture expresses sometimes by the terms conversion and sanctification, sometimes by those of resurrection, regeneration, new birth, and new creation.

We may likewise observe that the phrase “ new creature ” was not entirely unknown among the Jews. When they spoke of proselytes, they often called them new men, persons new-born ; and expressed their conversion by being born again, and by the appellation of a second or new birth, which is not very far from the idea of our text. So also when the son of a Jew, after having studied five years in the books of Moses, and

* Mark i. 24.

† 1 John iii. 8.

three years in the traditions of the oral law, had attained the age of thirteen years, and, with that age, a competent knowledge of their customs and religion, they described him as a new creature; meaning that then he was another man, very different from what he was born. St. Paul would teach us that Christians deserve that name better than the proselytes of the synagogue, or the best instructed pupils in the school of the Pharisees. In Jesus Christ we have instructions, principles, and mysteries, different from those of the law. The Jews, in comparison with us, were no more than children under a tutor; children whose progress in learning was very small. But we, when by the knowledge of the gospel and the grace of the Divine Spirit, the eyes of our understanding are enlightened, our wills renewed, and our sentiments and inclinations reformed, we may without doubt, in a state so noble, so different from our first birth, justly receive the illustrious appellation of "new creatures."

I cannot forbear remarking in these words a double opposition: first, to the purely natural state of man; secondly, to the state of depraved and guilty nature. The regenerated believer is "a new creature," in opposition to Adam, even in his state of innocence. I acknowledge that when our first parent came out of the hands of his Creator, he was a new, beautiful, and

THE NEW CREATURE.

excellent creature. Never among bodies was anything more admirable than the organized and living body of man: and that body, recently formed from the earth, without any irregularity of constitution or temper, was originally the palace of an innocent soul. That pure soul bore the impress of its Maker; its faculties and affections were all in perfect order. God beheld the beautiful composition he had produced; he approved the work of his hands. Satan was jealous, and attempted to spoil its excellence. His efforts were but too successful. The happy state of innocent man was of very short duration. But behold a new work proceeding from the hands of God, more durable than the first. Jesus Christ comes to form from the ruins "a new creature." What a noble creature it is; with those piercing eyes of faith to discover sacred mysteries; with those ears chaste, pure, and attentive to the Divine voice; with that new taste for heavenly things; with those exalted sentiments, those refined affections, those regular and holy emotions produced in it by the Spirit of God! What a noble creature, dignified, if we may be allowed the terms, with immortality and immutability! The union of the Spirit of God with the regenerate soul can never be dissolved; grace is not a mutable principle, like nature. The first man might change, fall, and die: he did so. But the new man, created under better

auspices, "born of the incorruptible seed of the "word,"* "abideth for ever."† His life cannot be wholly destroyed; his beauty, the image of his Maker, cannot be effaced. The "new creature" is as immortal as angels. God will not lose what has cost him so dear; he has made it for an endless duration. Everything passes away: riches and honours, cities and empires, the whole "world and the lust thereof." There are also some spiritual graces which will cease to exist, as faith, hope, and patience; but the "new creature" remains: this is a work formed for eternity.

In the second place, the regenerate man is called "a new creature," particularly in opposition to the state of sin and of "the old man:" that state of blindness in which ignorance, superstition, and unbelief reigned over the mind; that state of corruption in which sin had so enslaved and injured all the faculties that nothing escaped its baneful influence. Satan triumphing over the creature, made him anew, so to speak, in his own image; he communicated to him his form and character. He made, as it were, a body of all the inordinate desires, all the passions, and criminal habits, and gave them pride and self-love for a soul. That state of corruption was, at the same time, a state of death and condemnation, the object of Divine abhorrence and ven-

* 1 Peter i. 23.

† 1 John ii. 17.

geance. But Christ, who came to destroy death, sin, and all the works of the devil, calls us to crucify the old man, to mortify his members, and to annihilate that work of Satan ; instead of which the “new creature” is to be formed within us.

Our next reflection upon this expression of the Holy Spirit is, that it evinces the change produced in a man truly converted to be something supernatural, the work of God, the effect of his infinite power and immediate operation. Hence the apostle says in another place : “ We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” * The ideas and words which the Scripture employs ought not to be violently strained beyond their design, as we have already observed ; but neither must they be enfeebled, divested of all their force, and reduced to little or no meaning. We must give them all the extent which belongs to them, and all the truth and reality which the doctrine of that Scripture shows them to contain. We know it ought not to be concluded from these expressions that man is converted without means, without motives, without the word, and that exhortations are useless ; because in the first creation God employed no instruments, no agent, no means, but acted immediately, in every instance, by his own infinite power. No ; God converts us not in an enthusiastic way, without the presentation of any

* Eph. ii. 10.

exterior object: he employs his word, and presents motives to our understandings, at the same time that he works immediately within us by the operation of his grace. But when the regenerate man is called "a new creature," the manifest allusion to the first creation necessarily suggests that there is some resemblance between the work of God in grace and the formation of the first man; and that the Divine power is displayed in both in a manner far surpassing all the ability of natural agents.

It is common to distinguish two kinds of creation, properly so called: one in which God makes something out of nothing; he works on pure nullity; he gives existence to the whole subject, to its substance as well as its qualities. Thus God created angels, the original matter of the world, and the soul of man. But it is likewise denominated creation, when God makes anything from matter which had no previous aptitude to receive the form he impresses on it. In this sense the formation of man from the dust is called a creation.

If you inquire in which of these two senses regeneration is called a creation, and the believer a new creature, I shall reply, that it appears to me to be principally with reference to the second. In conversion, God finds a subject, that is man, his soul, its faculties, an understanding, a will: but that man is in reality no more disposed, in the state of sin, to receive the Divine impress, the new

form of regeneration, than the dust to become a living and organized body. This must not be called exaggeration : it is strictly true. Apply all the natural agents to that depraved man, that cold and lifeless earth, and you will never produce a living soul, a new man. Urge all the lessons of philosophers, the decrees of legislators, the doctrines of Moses ; let parents and masters come with their precepts ; let all creatures come with their exhortations, promises, and threatenings ; they will never produce “ a new creature,” if God himself be not present, if he operate not on this earth, if he do not by his omnipotent and immediate agency create “ a new man,” and “ a new spirit.”

But not only has “ the natural man ” no predisposition to become “ a new creature,” he has a disposition diametrically opposite. In the creation of the world, nullity made no resistance ; there was no struggle between nonentity and Divine power ; and in the formation of man the dust which was to be so eminently ennobled made no opposition ; the earth was not able to say, “ Why hast thou made me thus ? ” But in conversion the nullity is rebellious against its Creator ; the dust is in arms against him who would make it such an admirable work ; the potsherd of the earth says to its Former, “ Why dost thou make me thus ? ” The Divine will finds in us a will directly contrary. When God commands and says, “ I will,” we immediately

reply, "I will not." Grace must triumph over our oppositions, and convert our rebellion into docility and obedience, in order to make us "new creatures." Here, then, the glory of God is equally as conspicuous as it was in the first creation.

Let us add that in the first creation the creature was formed without any perception of the Divine agency ; but in regeneration the new creature sees, understands, and feels the internal operation of the Lord. We are not moved like stones, without feeling it. God draws us, and we run ; God makes us willing, and we consent ; God commands us, and we obey. If we are purely passive in the first instant of conversion, yet we are not insensible of the operation of grace ; we cannot be changed without presently perceiving it ; and we act afterwards as we are moved and excited by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Now it appears to me more glorious to the Creator to operate on beings who perceive his operation, and who, as he acts upon them, taste the sweetness and happiness of their state, than upon beings without consciousness or perception. I see more glory in rendering creatures holy and happy than in forming the heavens and earth.

These remarks are sufficient to show that the production of the "new creature" requires an exertion of the same almighty power which was

displayed at the beginning in the creation of all things. For this reason the Scripture declares, that "it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do;"* that it is he who "draweth,"† who "quickeneth," who "raiseth" us from the dead;‡ and all "according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself,"§ "according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead."|| Thus the language of our text refutes the opinion of those who in the conversion of man ascribe too little to Divine agency. The agency of God in it is generally acknowledged; but does he act only by the intervention of means, by the word, and by circumstances? Does he act only in a feeble manner, dependent on the liberty of man, and always liable to be resisted? Does he act only as on a subject rather unfavourably disposed, yet partly prepared to receive the form with which he invests it? Is it to God, or to man, that the glory of conversion ought to be ascribed? Take the decision of the whole question in the words of St. Paul: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;" consequently a work of God, and not of man, or of any natural cause whatsoever; a work formed by omnipotent

* Phil. ii. 13; 1 Thess. ii. 13.

† John vi. 44.

‡ Eph. ii. 5, 6; Col. ii. 11.

§ Phil. iii. 21.

|| Eph. i. 19, 20.

agency, which infallibly and invincibly produces its effect. When anything is done in a way of creation, it is not necessary that the subject be prepared; the Divine power removes all difficulties, and to that we must consequently attribute the conversion of man, as to its original, principal, and immediate cause.

On the “new creature” I have only one reflection to make, but it is a very important one, that the change wrought in the converted believer is very great, both in itself and its effects. We must not deceive ourselves: we must not form a slight idea of regeneration. If conversion were a trivial matter; if there were not a wide difference between the unregenerate man and the sanctified believer, the term “new creature” would be altogether hyperbolical and extravagant. An inconsiderable change was unworthy of so striking an idea being borrowed to represent it. If it were merely necessary to assume a decent exterior, to have the righteousness of the hypocrite or pharisee, or to rise to the honour of men of the world; if it were sufficient to attain the virtue of philosophers, or even the state of many professed Christians; if no more were required than to be baptized, to learn by memory the doctrine of Christ, to discourse and argue concerning it, to attend the services of the church, to repeat some prayers and bestow some alms,—this would be far from meriting the

THE NEW CREATURE.

appellation of "a new creature." This is not such a great thing: it was not necessary for this that the Son of God should forsake his heaven, that he should come to languish in misery, and die upon a cross; it was not necessary that the Holy Spirit should descend in the form of tongues of fire, and that Jesus Christ should work so many miracles in confirmation of the gospel. It would be unnecessary for God to display all the energy of his grace. Some human motives, some external laws may be sufficient to lead men to certain external or partial changes.

Let us not deceive ourselves, therefore; the "new creature" is something more than the moral virtue of philosophers; and "Verily, verily, I say unto you that," if your regeneration go no further, "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." * The virtue of the philosophers sprang only from pride and the love of glory; and every good action which proceeds merely from such a principle is always a bitter fruit, the production of the wild olive, and not of the good olive. A life regulated wholly by human principles is always the old Adam, though it may cover its wrinkles with paint, and hide its deformity under a specious mask. If you have none but human virtues, I shall always tell you, "One thing thou lackest." † What do I say? You want everything. You are destitute

* Matt. v. 20; John iii. 3, 5.

† Mark x. 21.

of the love of God, of the principle of grace, of the "one thing needful."

Let us go still further. To feel some taste for heavenly things; to experience some transient desires after a holy life; to refrain from particular sins; to weep at times over past errors; to forsake certain passions; is not all that is necessary to constitute "a new creature." There must be a predominant love towards God, a preference of God and Jesus Christ above all things; there must be a general opposition to all vices, a fixed and constant resolution to lead a holy life, an actual observance of the Divine commands, with pleasure, joy, and perseverance.

I am well aware that the "new creature" is not without the remains of sin and the relics of the old Adam: we must not expect to find in the present state a sanctification so perfect as to see nothing but the work of the infinitely pure God without any of the pollution of the old serpent. No; the new creature in grace is different from the new creature in glory: the first is renewed from day to day, and changes only by degrees, retaining always something to correct; whereas the second will be completely delivered from all the impurities and imperfections of corrupt nature. Christ heals not our souls instantaneously, as he healed the bodies of men in his miracles; he renews us in a gradual way. But it is, nevertheless, true that

THE NEW CREATURE.

the state of the believer, who is called the "new creature," is a great change: not only great in its causes, which are the heavenly word of the gospel, and the operation of the Divine Spirit within us; but great in itself, in its nature, and in its effects.

In the regenerate man, all things assume a new appearance. The sinner is like the chaos, where everything was in utter disorder; the light was confounded with the darkness, the humid with the dry, the cold with the hot: all was destitute of life and motion. But from the midst of the chaos arose a world beautifully arranged; the light separated from the darkness, everything took its proper place, disorder ceased, and order everywhere appeared. As much as the universe, in the beauty and symmetry in which we behold it, differs from the rude and confused mass of the primitive chaos, so much does the regenerate man differ from the sinner. There are no longer simply a few gleams of reason, blended with innumerable prejudices, confused ideas, and false maxims of the flesh; there are no more some vague and imperfect glimmerings wandering amid the shades of ignorance and error. A light, distinct and pure, reigns in the superior part of the soul, as in a firmament, enlightening the understanding and driving away the false opinions and delusive imaginations of the carnal man. There are no longer

merely some remains of heat buried in extreme cold—I mean some motions of conscience, some instincts of natural religion, smothered under corruption and the passions ; the soul is inflamed with the love of God. There everything has taken its proper place ; God has the supremacy, and the love of the creature is subordinate to the love of God ; the affections are under due regulation, and every one of the virtues is at its post. What a change !

This change may be illustrated by another comparison. When a vessel alters her course ; when she sails towards the west instead of sailing towards the east ; when she takes a direction opposite to the first, you very justly call it a new voyage, a different navigation. It is still the same vessel, with the same sails, the same mariners ; but that vessel has changed her course, her destination ; she sails towards another point of the compass ; other winds waft her along—winds quite contrary to the first ; and the helm and prow of the ship are turned in opposite directions, so that it is no longer the same voyage : every gust of wind, every surge, removes her further from her first course, and carries her toward another coast.

It is the same in regeneration. The same man remains ; the same faculties of body and soul, the same passions. But the man has changed his last end ; and the change of the last

end makes an entire moral change. In the state of nature, man is his last end to himself; self-love and the love of the creatures constitute his supreme good, the centre on which he moves, his predominant affection, and the rule of his actions. Everything is regulated by self-love, and made subservient to the proposed end, which is to obtain happiness in the possession of sensual pleasures, and the enjoyment of the creatures. But, in the state of grace, God is our sovereign good, his glory is our ultimate end; we place our supreme felicity in union with God, in the possession of him and his eternal blessings. Everything else is subordinate to this; toward this all our actions tend, and by this everything is changed. We have the same faculties; but those faculties have a different employment. We have the same passions, hope and fear, joy and sorrow; but those passions have changed their objects; and in this sense it may be said that we have no longer the same fear or the same hope. A different wind fills our sails. The wind which blew before was the spirit of the world by which we were animated: the wind which now wafts us forward is "the wind which bloweth where it listeth," the gale of the Spirit; and our voyage is entirely changed.

Would you see examples of this wonderful change? Behold that abandoned woman. When grace made her "a new creature," it changed

her love, her sentiments, her desires. She punished her heart for its irregular attachments by a bitter grief, a total renunciation of all that she had inordinately loved, and a public repentance. What a revolution in that heart! What a transmutation! Her eyes and all her senses become instruments of her penitence; her whole life assumes another form. Behold also Paul himself—the same who tells us of the “new creature”—how widely different is he from what he was before his conversion! Saul was a persecuting Jew, a blasphemer of Jesus Christ, full of prejudices and false zeal, a jealous defender of the ceremonies of Moses, blindly attached to the righteousness of the law, an obstinate disciple of the rabbies, an implicit admirer of their traditions. He was a furious lion, seeking for prey, and breathing out nothing but blood and carnage. Paul is another man: he is the mortal enemy of pharisaic pride, the great defender of grace and of the righteousness which is by faith; he will know nothing but Jesus crucified; he will glory only in his cross, and he is crucified with him. He has no more blood to shed but his own; he wishes to be offered on the sacrifice of the faith of his brethren, and the flame of his charity consumes him from day to day. Are these two men, Paul and Saul? Or is it another soul in the same body?

Happy those who thus become "new creatures." Happy man who can also say, "I live, yet not I;" I am no longer the sinner that I was. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;"* his grace has renewed me. Happy those to whom it may be said, "Such were some of you." Ye were avaricious, revengeful, gluttonous, licentious; "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."†

Those who pretend to pass for true believers, and who can scarcely give any evidence of having experienced a considerable change, are strongly to be suspected of not being what they boast themselves to be. Here we have only to observe, that in persons not converted from among Jews or heathens, but born of Christian parents, the "new creature" is not always equally perceivable in the exterior; because grace forms it by degrees, operating within in an insensible manner, while Providence is employing, without, a good education and various circumstances; so that a man having had sentiments of piety from his infancy, and never having lived in flagrant enormities, his conversion is less evident and remarkable. But, after all, the change is always entire with respect to the original corruption in which he was born even as others. It is that great change of inclinations and principles, of

* Gal. ii. 20.

† 1 Cor. vi. 11.

THE NEW CREATURE.

ends and actions, and that assemblage of virtues which adorns the regenerate man, that Paul denominates the “new creature.” To that state of regeneration, to that happy renovation of life, he invites us when he says: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”

I shall now first ask you, my brethren, Are you “in Christ?” This inquiry surprises you. Persons who have been baptized, who bear the name of Christians, who pray, who adore Jesus Christ, who call themselves his children, his people; who eat his flesh, and drink his blood; who have suffered perhaps for his cause, have forsaken for him their property and their native country; persons who, for thirty or forty years, have professed and perhaps thought themselves believers, and who presume to hope for heaven on the ground of their faith,—to ask them whether they are in Christ, is to offend them. But are you “new creatures?” If you are, you have cause to rejoice; you belong to our Lord; you are engrafted into him; you enjoy his influence, you participate his life, you are his members. But if you are not yet “new creatures,” whatever you may pretend, and however you may flatter yourselves, you are not in Jesus Christ; for “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”

What misery to have lived even till old age in the external communion of the church without

THE NEW CREATURE.

having entered into the vital communion of Jesus Christ ! What misery to be still out of Christ, out of the ark, out of the fountain of life ! What shame to usurp the name of Christian, and to possess only the title without the reality ! But how would you have us to consider you as “new creatures,” you who still fashion yourselves “according to the former lusts” of the flesh,* you who live in all the excesses of sinners ? Pride, revenge, profane oaths, criminal attachments, habits of avarice, intrigues, evil communications, inebriety, worldliness,—are these marks of the “new creature,” or of “the old man ?” Your old quarrels, your everlasting dissensions, your habitual slanders ; in a word, all your sins, always or almost always equally alive,—are these evidences that you have “put off the old man with his deeds,” to “put on the new ?”†

You who are not yet regenerate, do you not wish to become so ? have you no desire to fulfil what your Christianity, the obligation of your baptism, and the example of Jesus Christ, demand of you ? Do you not wish to be renewed ? You will tell me, perhaps, it depends not on yourselves ; the new creature is the work of grace. This is true ; but it is so the work of grace that it is necessary for you to labour about it yourselves. You can do nothing without grace ; but think not that grace will convert you

* 1 Pet. i. 14 ; Eph. ii. 3.

† Col. iii. 9, 10.

without exciting you to action. Grace converts not in an enthusiastical way, without means. It acts in union and concert with the word. Seek grace, then, in seeking the word, the preaching of the gospel, and the means appointed by God for your salvation. If you want grace, pray for it; be frequent and importunate in your applications to Divine mercy. Often say, "Lord, thou hast made me once; but unless thou make me over again a second time, it were better for me never to have been born. 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.'*" What shall I do with this old, this corrupt heart which I have within me? It defiles all that it touches, there is nothing good in it; take it away; give me that new heart which thou hast promised." Often say, "Lord, I am dead, and thou art 'the resurrection and the life;' come and raise me from the tomb of my corruption. Behold these dry bones, and cause the breath of life to re-enter them." Christians, who want grace, seek it in praying and acting; seek it in the use of means. The word is the seed of the new man. Preaching is the trumpet which causes the dead to arise from their tombs; be attentive to its voice. Expect everything from God in the practice of your duty, and in the neglect of nothing that he has enjoined.

* Psalm li. 10.

Do you wish to become new creatures? Begin by entertaining a just abhorrence of your natural state. Consider the deformity of the old man. We have each our own, which has its particular features; for each individual has his peculiar and characteristic vices. Is there anything more odious than an old predominant sin, which fetters the soul, disgraces the whole life, and deprives of reason and liberty? Let us emancipate ourselves from these old tyrants; let us cast off their yoke. Have we been covetous? let us be so no longer. Have we been debauchees? let us renounce our debaucheries. Say not, "I am unable to do this; I may as well cast off my skin as emancipate myself from passions which are naturalized in me? What? would you rather continue for ever in a state of ignominy and danger? Would you rather, by growing old without any amendment, render your evils more incurable, your passions more insurmountable, your corruption more invincible? Would you rather, living and dying as obstinate sinners, die without grace, without hope, and become victims of the wrath of the Almighty? Do you know that no changes are to be expected in hell? What madness is it rather to perish than to become new creatures!

Renovation is altogether excellent and beneficial. We are transformed by it into the likeness of God; we are made in his image; we

become “partakers of the Divine nature.”* We experience the love of our heavenly Bridegroom ; we are children of God, fellow-citizens with saints, companions of angels. What is more noble and glorious ? What is more desirable than to be holy, joyful, content in every situation ; to fear neither age nor death, and to be assured of a blissful immortality ? You who are afraid of time which devours all things ; which in spite of you eclipses your beauty, blasts the bloom of your countenance, obscures the lustre of your eyes, withers your complexion, and will soon engrave on your forehead wrinkles which you cannot hide ;—ye men and women too much in love with life, too much idolaters of your beauty ;—you in whom the very thought of old age excites terror, but who are already approaching it ; and you whose blood is half congealed with age, and who can never hope to see a return of your youth ; you who pursue it, and cannot recall it ; you to whom no medicines, no skill can restore what age has taken away ;—you also, young persons, who, because you are further from the last season of life, flatter yourselves with the expectation of a long and unclouded spring, but who, perhaps, will very soon see it pass away without being able to prolong its continuance ;—all of us, both young and old, who would be almost equally desirous to enjoy, if

* 2 Peter i. 4.

THE NEW CREATURE.

it were possible, eternal youth and unfading beauty,—of what are we thinking? Why do not we avail ourselves of the secret which grace presents to us? Why do not we labour to become new creatures? Then we shall bid defiance to death and time. Then we shall have a beauty that will never decay. Are we young? we shall conceal, under the flower of our youth, a flower incomparably more beautiful—an internal beauty beyond all description transcending that of the exterior—a beauty which will charm even Jesus Christ, our heavenly Bridegroom. Shall we be old? we shall not be less amiable in the sight of God; on the contrary, in proportion as our outward man decays, our inner man being renewed day by day, we shall approach nearer and nearer to perfect beauty, and shall daily be more pleasing to God.

Let us, then, be new creatures: thus let us show that we belong to Jesus Christ, that we have known and felt the power of his gospel, and the efficacy of his death and resurrection. The time past ought to have sufficed for us to fulfil the lusts of the flesh; let the old man die. It is past recovery; to-day we vow its destruction. Sin, which hast lived too long, thou shalt die. It is done. Avarice, worldliness, luxury, pride, envy, detraction, revenge, we renounce, we forsake you for ever. Let holiness and righteousness come in their place. Christian virtues,

THE NEW CREATURE.

come and reign in our hearts. Divine grace, come and form them there. Then, let the year open or close ; let our days pass away ; let this year lay us in the tomb, or let us survive it,—it matters not to us ; we shall be in Christ, and in Christ we are superior to time and death. If we are in Christ by grace, it is enough ; we shall be eternally in him and with him in glory.

May this be our happy lot. And to him, as the supreme Lord of time, the Arbiter of life and death, the Author of the new creature, and the Father of eternity, be honour and dominion, might and majesty for ever. Amen.

REGENERATION.

THE CAUSE AND MEANS OF REGENERATION.

BY

GEORGE PAYNE, LL.D.

REGENERATION.

JOHN iii. 3.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again [or from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

THE term regeneration may be considered as denoting the whole of that moral change which is effected upon men by the instrumentality of the gospel. This definition unfolds, at once, the nature of regeneration, and the way in which it is effected. It exhibits Divine truth, when the Holy Spirit opens the heart to receive it, as the direct and proximate source of all the views or opinions we are brought to entertain of Divine things in general, and of all the holy affections which are awakened in the mind towards them; and it further exhibits the influence of the Holy Spirit, as the direct and proximate cause of that spiritual perception of the meaning and evidence of the truth, without which it can manifestly produce no more effect upon our minds than if it had never been com-

REGENERATION.

municated to the world. Thus the influence, both of the word and of the Spirit of God, are necessary to effect the renewal of a sinner in the spirit of his mind. By some operation, which we pretend not to explain, he is brought to perceive the true meaning, that is, the spiritual meaning, of Divine truth, and the evidence on which it founds its claims to be a revelation from God. Objective truth, to use rather antiquated phraseology, becomes subjective truth. The truth in the word is transferred to the mind. It forms the opinions and sentiments of the individual; and operates in the production of that body of holy affections and desires, and hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, which constitute unitedly the Christian character. Thus a distinction is made between the offices of the truth and of the Spirit in the work of regeneration; yet the influence of both is necessary, and it may be fairly questioned whether, in the case of an adult, a single instance of conversion to God can be produced without their combined operation. Without the word, or the truth, we should be destitute of the means of renovation—there could be no love, at least rational love, to God, no choice of him as our portion, no self-dedication to his service; and without the influence of the Spirit, these means, even when skilfully employed, would be ineffectual, because man, left to himself, would uniformly reject the truth, and

thus deprive himself of the holy influence it would exert upon his mind.

The two points, then, which I shall endeavour to establish are the following:—

I. That the truth, or the gospel, is the means or instrument, and may therefore be considered the proximate cause of regeneration.

II. That it is the especial agency of the Holy Spirit which insures the success of this means or instrument, and therefore the Holy Spirit must be considered the ultimate cause of regeneration.

I. We have to show that the truth, or the gospel, is the means or instrument, and may therefore be considered the proximate cause of regeneration. In unfolding these general statements, there are two distinct points to which the attention of the reader will be directed.

First, that the truth is the instrument of conversion, to the exclusion of every other; and, secondly, that it is, in itself, perfectly adequate to the production of the important effects which are attributed to it.

1st. The truth is the instrument of conversion, to the exclusion of every other. To the exclusion of any additional communication from God; for when the Holy Spirit enlightens the understanding, it is not by imparting a new revelation, but by enabling us to perceive the spiritual, that is, the real meaning of the old. He takes of the

REGENERATION.

things of Christ, and shows them to us. It is the entrance of God's word that giveth light, that giveth understanding to the simple. In like manner, when the Holy Spirit subdues the love of sin which had formerly reigned in the bosom, and kindles within it a flame of love to God, and holiness, he does not accomplish this by imparting to us a more awful view of the evil of sin than is exhibited in the inspired volume, or, in any respect, a different view; nor by surrounding the character of God with more irresistible charms than those in which the sacred writers have arrayed it; but by leading us to take that view of both which is presented by the Holy Scriptures. The truth is thus the exclusive instrument of regeneration.

To invalidate this statement, some have referred to the case of children dying in infancy, and who, as they are the subjects of original sin, need regeneration before they can be admitted to heaven. The proper answer is, I apprehend, that, in the full sense of the term "regeneration," the sense in which it is used in reference to an adult, comprehending the whole of that moral change which has been described, infants do not need, and are, indeed, incapable of regeneration. In infants there are no mistaken apprehensions of Divine things to be corrected; no actual unholy affections towards them to be subdued and removed; for in the mind of an infant there are,

REGENERATION.

in reference to these things, no apprehensions and no affections of any description. There exists, doubtless, in the mind of every infant the germ of that unholy fruit which, unless the grace of God prevent, will become at length visible ; but the fruit itself has not as yet made its appearance. As far as they need regeneration, they are regenerated ; that is, an influence is exerted upon them by the Spirit of all grace which will insure a holy exercise of the powers of their minds, when they become capable of moral perceptions and affections. Some change is produced upon them, of what nature I do not pretend to say, leading certainly to their subsequent devotion to God ; but this, so far from being effected by an instrument different from the truth, is not effected by means at all, but by the direct agency of the Spirit of God. And, if any one should reply that, as this is not regeneration in the sense in which I have used the term, infants may be admitted to heaven without regeneration, I would reply, without being very careful to defend the accuracy of the phraseology, that they are regenerated in the same sense in which they are depraved ; the germ of sin is removed, the germ of holiness is introduced—the only change that can be effected by any power upon the mind of an infant.

Others, again, refer to certain individuals in heathen lands, who, though they never heard the

REGENERATION.

gospel, have given, as it is alleged, hopeful evidence of conversion to God. In reply, I would observe that it may possibly be doubted whether the alleged facts are sufficiently substantiated. It seems to me impossible to conceive of renovated affections, in the full sense of the expression, as the result of an immediate and direct influence of the Spirit of God, without the knowledge of the truth. While our physical constitution remains what it is, a spiritual perception of the Divine character must surely exist, in the order of nature at least, previous to the exercise of love to it.

Further, the truth is the instrument of regeneration, to the exclusion of those means which Divine Providence frequently employs to rouse men to serious reflection. It sometimes happens that the footsteps of a sinner going on in his sins are arrested by unlooked-for and dreadful calamities. The hand of death suddenly snatches from him the companions of his guilt, or the power of God stretches him on the bed of affliction, and brings him within view of the eternal world. Conscience shakes off her slumbers, and will be heard. A spirit of penitence is awakened; and the delightful issue of the visitation is, that he becomes a servant of God, having his "fruit unto holiness," and the end thereof "everlasting life." Still it is not the affliction that turns his heart from sin to God; affliction is utterly incapable of doing this. It is by "the incor-

REGENERATION.

ruptible seed of the word," and not by any of the mercies or judgments of God, that sinners are born again. Divine providence is the minister of Divine grace, but it is only the minister. It is often employed to awaken serious reflection ; to recall the neglected truths of God's word to the recollection of the sinner ; to impress them powerfully upon his conscience ; and to fix his attention upon that truth which saves the soul from death and condemnation. But still it is the gospel of God, and not the providence of God, that enlightens the eyes and sanctifies the heart.

2nd. We proceed to show that the truth is perfectly adequate to the production of the important effects which are attributed to it. A very few remarks will be sufficient, it is apprehended, to illustrate the truth of this assertion. Regeneration, we have seen, consists, partly at least, in the illumination of the understanding. A man who has undergone the change designated by that word, entertains just views of himself—of God, his perfections and government—of Christ, and of the way of salvation through him ; just views, in short, of Divine things in general. And is not the gospel, or the word, or the truth—for the three terms mean the same thing—adapted to communicate just apprehensions of Divine things? Is there not in the Bible a correct representation of the state of

REGENERATION.

man by nature ; of the law of God ; and of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ ? Do we need anything more, in order to the illumination of the understanding, than to receive with implicit faith the testimony of the inspired writers in reference to these things ? Surely not. If the mind of any man is not enlightened by the gospel, it is not because the gospel is not able to impart light, but because his mind is shut against it : “ The light shineth in darkness ; and the darkness comprehended it not.” Regeneration is in short, as we have seen, a transference of the light of the word to the mind ; so that every new creature is made “ light in the Lord.”

Regeneration, we have further seen, partly consists in the purification of the affections. A man who has been born again has been brought to loathe himself ; to repent in dust and ashes ; to hate sin, and to love holiness ; to meditate with delight on the law of God ; to rejoice in the Divine character, and to lean upon the Divine arm for support under the pressure of the heaviest trials. He has been brought to contemplate, with unbounded delight, the person and the work of Christ ; to rest his confidence upon his atonement ; to desire the blessings of his salvation more than his necessary food ; and to look forward to the moment when he shall see him as he is, as the consummation of all that he can hope or enjoy. Now, is not the gospel, when

REGENERATION.

understood and believed, adapted to effect this extraordinary moral change in the affections of all who receive it? What more is necessary to humble us before God, than to entertain that view of our character and state which is exhibited in his word?* What more is necessary to kindle in our bosoms the most animated love to God, than to receive that representation of his cha-

* The first thing to be done with any object of human thought "is," says Dr. Chalmers, "to apprehend it correctly—if it be an object fitted when thus seen, naturally and spontaneously fitted, to call forth certain emotions. Then, if these emotions have not been called forth in the heart of an individual, he is either a mutilated and imperfect being, or he really does not see the object, such as it is. It is a want of the feeling correspondent to the object that is a proof that he judges of it wrong—that he apprehends it wrong. If a man be as little moved by the perfections of the Godhead, as he is by the properties of a triangle, then we should say more than that he does not adequately feel those perfections; we should say that he does not understand them. He may march triumphant over the whole of their theological demonstrations; but, then, he is only playing at logic with words."—Vol. v. 122—3.

Again. The test of our having discerned things aright "is that we are affected by them aright. We do not see an object to be amiable, if the amiableness be unfelt by us. We see it not to be venerable, if we do not feel the veneration. We do not recognise it in its character of solemnity and sacredness, unless we are solemnized. We are but holding converse with a name, and not with a thing, unless the properties of that thing call forth those proper susceptibilities which, when really seen, they are calculated to awaken."—*Ibid.*

The gospel is not understood and believed when it does not affect the heart.

racter which is given us in the Scriptures of truth? What more is necessary to inspire love to the Saviour, and to lead us to build upon his atonement as the ground of hope towards God, than to possess those views of his person and work which are presented to us in the inspired volume? Surely nothing. I do not refer at present, let it be observed, to the agency by which we become possessed of spiritual knowledge (because that would tend, in this stage of the inquiry, to embarrass us); but I ask, whether it is possible for an individual who understands the nature of the mind, and the laws which regulate the exercise of its powers, to doubt, when we are brought to entertain those views of the things of the Spirit of God, which are presented by every page of the inspired volume, that is, when we are brought to regard them as supremely excellent, that we shall give our supreme affections to them? Surely not. Various causes, indeed, may conspire to prevent an object appearing to us lovely which is really so; but it is impossible to prevent the going out of the affections to that which does so appear. No instrument, then, in addition to the gospel, is necessary to the purification of the heart of man.

Regeneration, furthermore, subdues the natural stubbornness of the will—communicates an enlightened and a tender conscience—gives birth to new joys and sorrows, new hopes and fears,

new pleasures and pursuits, all of which are characterized by holiness. Now, it is manifest that when the gospel is understood and believed, when its testimony stands in the mind as true testimony, and the blessings which it exhibits appear supremely important and excellent, it must prove a powerful and an effectual instrument, in the hand of the Spirit of God, of effecting this change—of originating all the holy feelings to which we have just alluded. It is impossible to illustrate all these particulars separately; to show how the gospel, when understood and believed, produces resignation to the will of God; how it renders the conscience sensible of the slightest deviations from the known path of duty; how it causes us to joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, to mourn over the depravity which still cleaves to us, to fear sin, and to hope for heaven; how it leads us to reckon ourselves to be “dead unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The preceding illustrations will, I trust, have rendered it unnecessary to say more than that, when the understanding of an individual is enlightened by the Holy Spirit—in other words, when he is brought to discern the truth, and excellence, and glory of the things of the Spirit of God, all the powers and susceptibilities of his mind must correspond, in their habitual state and exercise, with the nature of the objects which he contemplates.

REGENERATION.

The holy seed, when sown in his mind, will certainly germinate, and produce corresponding fruit. Hence it is said of the gospel that "it worketh effectually in all them that believe;" that "it is the power of God unto salvation."

II. It is the special agency of the Holy Spirit which insures the success of the gospel; and, therefore, the Holy Spirit may be regarded as the ultimate cause of regeneration. On this part of the subject I propose—

First. To establish the assertion that in the regeneration of men the agency of the Holy Spirit is employed; so that this Divine agent may be regarded as the ultimate cause of regeneration; and—

Secondly. To offer a few general remarks with reference to the nature of his agency, and the manner in which it is put forth.

1st. Then, we are to establish the fact that in the regeneration of men the agency of the Holy Spirit is employed; so that this Divine agent may be regarded as the ultimate cause of regeneration.

This assertion is supported by the express testimony of Scripture. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," John i. 12, 13. To be born of God is to be born of the Spirit of

REGENERATION.

God ; for we find our Lord assuring Nicodemus that "except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God : " "that," he adds, "which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," John iii. 5, 6. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," Titus iii. 5. "Of his own will begat he us," says James, "with the word of truth." And these declarations are in agreement with ancient prophecy. "A new heart," says God to his people of old, "will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh," Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

The assertion is again supported by the testimony of fact. "Our Lord," says Dwight, in illustration of this point, "preached to the Jewish nation at least three years and a half, if not more than four years. It will be admitted that he was the best of all preachers, and that his preaching was more perfectly calculated than any other to produce holiness in the hearts of those who heard him. Yet it will also be admitted that he was not a very successful preacher. We naturally ask, why was he not successful ? The apostles, on the contrary, though certainly and greatly inferior to Christ in wisdom and persuasiveness,

preached still with wonderful success. St. Peter, by the first sermon he preached to the Jews, probably converted more to the faith and obedience of the gospel than Christ during the whole of his ministry. We naturally ask, whence arose this wonderfully different efficacy in the preaching of St. Peter and that of his Master? The persons whom they both addressed were the same; they had been witnesses of the miracles of both. Why, then, were they perfectly dead to the preaching of Christ, and pricked to the heart and turned to God by that of Peter? The cause was not in the preaching. It was not in the hearers; for they were the same persons. It was, then, an extraneous cause. It was because the Spirit was not plentifully poured out upon the world till our Lord's personal ministry was closed. The success of Peter's preaching he himself distinctly ascribes to the outpouring of the Spirit."

And to what, we may again ask, are we to ascribe the wonderfully different effects produced by the preaching of the gospel in the present day? Under the same sermon, and therefore by an exhibition of the same truth, while the manner of exhibiting it is also the same, one perhaps is savingly converted to God, and another remains totally unaffected. The cause being the same, how comes it to pass that there is so great a difference in the effect? How does it happen

REGENERATION.

that one man is savingly benefited by the truth, and the other not? It can only be accounted for in one of two ways. Either Divine influence is exerted upon the mind of the former, or that mind is less prejudiced naturally against the gospel than the mind of the latter, and on that account receives the gospel, while the latter repels it. The latter cannot be the case for several reasons.

Were it true, it would constitute a foundation for boasting, in opposition to one of the main designs of the gospel. A sentiment which necessarily supposes that, in a moral point of view, one man is naturally better than another, less inveterately prejudiced against the truth, more accessible to conviction, more favourably disposed to admit the gospel testimony—cannot be a part of that truth, the grand intention of which is to stain the pride of man, and to exalt the glory of God. Unless we suppose that the success of the gospel is to be ascribed invariably to the influence of the Holy Spirit, it will be impossible for us to preserve entire the doctrine of salvation by grace. Should it be said, with a view to neutralize the argument here, that the candour which leads some to receive the gospel is not supposed to be the mere offspring of nature—that it is the gift of grace; I would answer that this amounts to the same thing with ascribing the actual reception of the gospel to Divine

REGENERATION.

influence, only that it is a more roundabout way of expressing the important fact.

2nd. I am to offer a few remarks in reference to the nature of this agency, and the manner in which it is put forth.

We must be most careful not to confound the agency of the Holy Spirit in regeneration with the influence of the truth, as a moral means of illumination and sanctification. It is not likely that any who concur with me in the previous statements will fall into this mistake. They will at once see how great and flagrant is the error to which I am now referring. Yet it has been committed by many. It is the error of Socinianism. Divine truth exerts a powerful influence upon the tempers and conduct of men; and, since that truth came from God, its influence upon the mind may be said to be the influence of God, or the Holy Spirit, upon the mind, just as the influence of physical causes in the material world may be said to be the influence of God. Thus will men resort to unmeaning generalities, or to doubtful analogies, borrowed from processes as mysterious as the cases they are brought forward to elucidate, rather than prostrate their understandings before the word of God.

To identify the influence of the Spirit, and the influence of the truth, is in fact to hold the doctrine of Divine influence in name, and to deny the thing itself; while to resort to any of the

REGENERATION.

material analogies to which I formerly referred, with the intention at least of explaining the matter, is, in my apprehension, little less than absurd. That energy which the Holy Spirit exerts when a sinner is converted to God is unlike any influence put forth in the physical world. It is of a nature entirely *sui generis*; or, if it be supposed to have any parallel at all, the parallel will be found in the primary act of creation, and not in those subsequent acts by which the motions, and changes, and all the phenomena of the material universe are secured.

I observe, then, that it is intimated, I apprehend, with sufficient distinctness in the sacred volume, that the influence for which we contend is exerted immediately or directly upon the mind. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness," says the apostle, "hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God"—or rather, to the light of the knowledge, etc.—"in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. iv. 6. Few things are more manifest to my mind than that God's shining into the heart is represented here as something previous, in the order of nature, to our attaining the knowledge of the glory of God. It shines into our heart to give the light—to insure to us the enjoyment of it: "Except," said our Lord, "a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." To the same effect are such passages

REGENERATION.

as the following: "I will give them an heart to know me," Jer. xxiv. 7; "And the Lord opened the heart of Lydia," etc.—expressions which clearly imply, I imagine, that that almighty energy from which spiritual knowledge resulted, was exerted immediately upon the heart, and not upon the truth, imparting to it additional power, and thus entering with it, or embodied in it, into the mind. I add further—

That in the very nature of the case it must be so. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." I can form no conception of the meaning of these words, if they are not intended to teach us that the mind, in its natural state, is morally incapable of taking just views of spiritual things; that their excellence and glory will not appear to it, because, in consequence of its perverted moral taste, the real excellence and glory of the gospel are not regarded as such. Here, indeed, is the great, I had almost said the exclusive, difficulty which accompanies the regeneration of a sinner. Give him spiritual and believing views of the things of the Spirit of God, and it is perfectly easy to account for the whole of the subsequent renovation which he undergoes; but to give him those views—this is the moral impossibility to be accomplished. Spiritual things appear to every mind in an aspect which is governed by the

state of that mind. Depravity of heart spreads a covering of deformity over the glorious character of God itself, as the frost-glass scatters the hoar of winter over the verdure and loveliness of spring. Of what avail would it be, while the interposing glass remains, that some mighty miracle should array the landscape in charms yet more exuberant and delightful? It would only multiply the gloomy horrors of the scene. On the same principle, we ask, "how a fuller disclosure of the Divine character could succeed in conveying an attractive view of that character to an ungodly man, while he looks at it, as he must do, through the perverting medium of his own depravity?" How can it be doubted that an influence which is not exerted directly upon the mind would not go to the root of the evil? It is in consequence of a defect in the minds of sinners, and not in the gospel, that it is misunderstood and rejected. It is revealed with sufficient clearness: it is accompanied with sufficient evidence of its truth. Were it possible for it to be stated ten thousand times more clearly than it is, and accompanied with ten thousand times more evidence, that would not relieve the defect which leads sinners to reject it. They would not repent though one should rise from the dead. "To suppose," as I have stated in another work, "that God renders the gospel successful by communicating some additional and mysterious energy to

it, is to suppose that the defect is in the truth, and not in the mind which rejects it. It is to suppose that there is not light enough in the gospel to enlighten, nor purity enough to sanctify, so that more must be given to it. But to maintain that Divine influence is exerted directly and immediately upon the heart of a sinner, is to suppose that the defect is there, and it goes immediately to relieve it. And certainly the defect is in the sinner himself. There are spiritual objects to be contemplated and loved; they are possessed of unrivalled and infinite excellence; all their excellence is exhibited as clearly and strongly as language can exhibit it by the gospel. But sinners have no eyes for excellence of this description." There must be an immediate, however inexplicable, operation of the Spirit of God upon the mind, called in Scripture, opening the heart, etc., before there can be a spiritual discernment of the things of the Spirit of God. The interposing glass must be removed, before their excellence, importance, and glory can appear such to the mind.

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

BY

THE REV. JOHN CAIRD, M.A.

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.*

JOHN iii. 7, 8.

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

THE change of which our Lord here speaks is not, as his incredulous auditor at first supposed, a physical one ; yet is it one which, in some respects, implies a revolution in man's being as great as if the strange fancy of Nicodemus had been literally true. Marvellous though it would be for the old man to become a little child again—for one surrounded with the cares and responsibilities of manhood, or sinking into the feebleness of age, to feel the shadow on the sundial of life going back, and the light of life's morning once more shining around him ; yet might such a return from the maturity or decline to the infancy of man's outward life involve nothing so wonderful as the

* Taken, by permission, from a volume of Sermons by the Rev. John Caird, M.A. Published by W. Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London.

entering upon a new spiritual history—the second birth of the soul. Could we for a moment entertain the supposition that some one here who is now far advanced in life, had this day become conscious, as if by some mysterious spell passing over him, that a new freshness was beginning to be infused into the springs of his physical life, that the form and features on which time's impress had unmistakably been set, were being moulded anew into the roundness and softness of childhood, and the worn and withered man was, by some strange influence, transformed again into the bright and buoyant creature of days long bygone,—yet even then, I repeat, extravagant and incredible as such a conception seems, we should have before us a transformation not at all so wonderful, so momentous, as that of which the text affirms the possibility. For it speaks, not of the re-construction of the outward form, but of the re-creating of the inward life; not of a mere external metamorphosis, but of an inner and vital change. And it cannot be doubted that mental and moral changes are far more momentous than physical; that a transformation of soul would revolutionize a man's being far more completely than a mere modification of bodily form and feature. The soul is the true essence of man's nature. The character, spirit, moral temper of the inner being constitutes the man, and everything else is outward and inci-

dental. The physical form and life, amidst a thousand changes, may leave the real man unaltered, or as little changed as the inhabitant by the re-construction of the house, or the person by the new making of the vesture that clothes it. Too early experience of life may force the mind into a premature exhaustion, so that beneath a youthful form there may be the old man's spirit; and, on the other hand, there are instances in which, by the tempered use of strong vital energies, an old man has preserved to the last a youthful, elastic spirit in the worn form of age. But in all cases, what the spirit is, that the man may truly be said to be. To regain, therefore, the child's form, would be but a slight transmutation compared with regaining the child-heart; and though the form and aspect of maturity or age remain without the slightest modification, yet if there be the birth of a new spirit life, the revival of a childlike heart and soul in the hidden depths of man's being, then is the change more marvellous, more momentous, than if the old man could in very deed go back and enter life anew.

Now, it is this inward change, this recommencement of the inner history, which every soul experiences that passes under the plastic touch of the Spirit of God. It is no fanciful notion which the Scripture teaches when it declares of believers that, "laying aside all malice,

guile, hypocrisies, envies," all the unhallowed and sophisticated tastes and habits of their false manhood, "they, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby;" or, in other words, that the simple desires and tastes of a little child, in a sense, rise again within their hearts. For in the soul that begins in real earnest to be devoted to God, there will be felt by degrees the wakening of a new and diviner life. A joy more sparkling than the joy of infancy, yet deeper, more enduring far, will steal upon it. There will be a new meaning in life to the quickened vision of the newborn soul. A new and more glorious aspect will gradually dawn upon the world, and outward objects and events will be invested with a novelty and vividness of interest akin to that of the happy time when, to the wondering gaze of childhood, all things were yet fresh and new. Within the heart, too, of the believer, there will rise, by degrees, a calm, unanxious trustfulness, a certain self-forgetfulness and freedom from worldly care, analogous to the unconscious and unquestioning reliance of a little child on the father's ability to provide for its needs. In one word, let the soul be visited by the renewing influence of the Spirit of God, and sooner or later there will be manifest in it the signs of a new and more glorious infancy—a reproduction of all the more attractive qualities of childhood,

yet purer, nobler far than they, as the life of spirit is more glorious than the life of sense.

Such, then, is the transformation of man's being, the necessity of which our Lord announced to the wondering Nicodemus in the words, "Ye must be born again." And if the idea of a second birth seemed so strange and wonderful to the man who understood literally our Saviour's language, not less marvellous would it appear to the mind that could attach to the words their true and spiritual import. But you perceive that, in order to obviate the difficulties to which the announcement of this mysterious doctrine had given rise in the mind of his auditor, our Lord proceeds, in the text, to suggest to him what may be called a simple argument from analogy. With infinite condescension, the Divine Teacher endeavours to remove the incredulity of the inquirer, by directing his mind to certain phenomena in the natural world, equally real, yet equally mysterious and inexplicable, with the spiritual change of which he had spoken. He bids the startled listener look around him, and see, in the simplest and most familiar facts and occurrences in nature, the evidence of powers and processes as inscrutable as are involved in the doctrine of the soul's second birth. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again"—every passing breeze contains the intimation of a mystery as great as this—"The wind bloweth where it

listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, yet canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

The argument of the text, then, is derived from the existence of parallel difficulties in nature and revelation. Let us endeavour to follow out this argument a little further, with the view of obviating certain objections to the doctrine of regeneration. The difficulties connected with the regenerating operation of the Spirit of God, to which the illustration of the text may be regarded as pointing, are these three—its Supernaturalness, its Sovereignty or apparent Arbitrariness, and its Secrecy. It is perhaps to the last of these points that the argument, in strict accuracy, should be confined ; but the analogy holds not less obviously in respect to the other two.

I. In not a few minds there is a certain shrinking from the supernatural, which renders such doctrines as that of the text peculiarly distasteful and difficult of reception. If, for the ignorant and superstitious, the invisible world possess a strange attraction, disposing the mind often to ascribe natural events to supernatural agencies, and to call in, on the most common occasions, the interposition of unseen and mysterious powers, there is an opposite class of minds in which the tendency is equally strong to explain everything by natural causes, and to exclude as much as possible the thought of any other than known

and familiar agents. Ignorance may indeed be the mother of a spurious devotion, but there is a practical scepticism more to be deprecated, of which self-sufficient knowledge is often the parent. It may be the tendency of the religion of an unenlightened age to translate every unexplained fact or phenomenon into the immediate interposition of the Deity. The poor savage hears a wrathful voice in every storm, and trembles as at the presence of a retributive power, when the portentous shadow crosses the sun's disc, or the white lightning quivers athwart the heavens. The ignorant mind creates out of its own terrors, in dreams, and impressions, and fluctuating moods, direct intimations of the Divine presence and will. But as society advances in knowledge, and as many of those events, formerly attributed to supernatural agency, are discovered to be the result of natural causes, it too often happens that, with the superstitious recognition, all practical acknowledgment of the Divine presence and agency is lost. Accustomed to the observation of natural causes at work around them, men cease to think of any other. The tendency becomes habitual to refer everything to laws of nature, and to imagine that, when we have specified the outward and physical causes of any phenomenon, we have completely accounted for it. The voice of God is no longer heard in the thunder when the laws

of electricity begin to be known. In the darkened luminary there is no shadow of the Almighty's wing to the observer who can calmly sit down and calculate the period and duration of the solar eclipse. The region of marvels is thus driven further and further back ; but the territory lost to superstition is seldom won for religion. The old gods of heathenism have long vanished from the woods and meadows and fountains ; but it is not that the one living and true God, but only gravitation, light, heat, magnetism, may be recognised as reigning in their forsaken haunts. And we carry the same tendency into the moral world. The outward agents in moral and spiritual changes are those on which we chiefly dwell. The power of motives, the influence of education, the natural efficacy of instructions, appeals, admonitions, warnings,—it is to these almost exclusively, and not to any direct operation of the Spirit of God, that we are apt to trace changes of character. We may be ready, indeed, decorously to remark, that no good can be done without the blessing of God, but we seldom realize the true significance of this statement. The interposition of a Divine agent in every instance of moral improvement may not be denied or controverted, but it is too often practically ignored. A child grows up gentle, amiable, pious ; and when we say that he had the benefit of a careful and religious education, we seem to ourselves to have given

the whole account of the matter. A careless youth develops into a thoughtful and serious manhood, and we remark on the sobering and mellowing effect of years. An irreligious man becomes devout, and the dangerous illness, or the severe domestic affliction, or the influence of a Christian friend or minister, has made him, we perhaps observe, a wiser and a better man. Seldom does the mind naturally turn to the thought—"the finger of God is here;" to many it would seem fanatical or irrational thus to speak. The idea of a mysterious Holy Spirit coming down from the heavens, and working in the man's mind, would but too often be regarded, if not avowedly, yet in our secret judgment, as a strange mystical notion peculiar to the domain of theology, but quite apart from our ordinary experience, having nothing in common with the plain realities of every-day life.

Now, it is to this habit of mind, this tendency, tacit or avowed, to shrink from the supernatural, that the text suggests a most striking corrective. For it brings before us the consideration that the supernatural is not confined to religion; it bids us look abroad upon the common world of sight and sense, and see there, in the most familiar processes and phenomena of nature, the proofs of an immediate Divine agency as mysterious, as inexplicable to man as any to which religion appeals. Not in the dim region of theological

mysteries alone, but amidst the sights and sounds of every-day life, we move in a world of wonders. Not spiritual things only, but every peeping bud, and every waving leaf, each glancing sunbeam and glistening dewdrop, the passing breeze, the falling shower, the rippling stream, imply the presence of a mysterious power and agency ever secretly working around us. There is a sense, in which science, with all its triumphs, returns to the creed of the world's infancy, and is compelled to admit the immediate presence of a supernatural power in the most ordinary movements of nature. For, after all, not the most splendid revelations of science have ever been able to disclose anything more than the regular sequences of events, the ways in which the Author of nature generally chooses to work, the self-imposed rules of Divine agency. Gravitation, light, heat, chemical affinity, are only abstractions; they are nothing in themselves without a personal will—a living agent, whose mode of working they express. Dead matter, however arranged, can never act of itself. Power, spontaneous activity, can never reside in dead and material things; it can dwell only in a person, a living, thinking, willing agent. A human mechanist may leave the machine he has constructed to work without his further personal superintendence, because when he leaves it, God's laws take it up, and by their aid the ma-

materials of which the machine is made retain their solidity ; the steel continues elastic, the vapour keeps its expansive power. But when God has constructed his machine of the universe, he cannot so leave it, or any the minutest part of it, in its immensity and intricacy of movement, to itself ; for, if he retire, there is no second God to take care of this machine. Not from a single atom of matter can he who made it for a moment withdraw his superintendence and support. Each successive moment, all over the world, the act of creation must be repeated. The existence of the world witnesses to a perpetuity of creating influence. Active omnipresence must flood the universe, or its machinery stops, and its very existence terminates. The signs of an all-pervading supernatural energy meet us wherever we turn. Every leaf waves in it, every plant in all its organic processes lives in it ; it rolls round the clouds, else they would not move ; it fires the sunbeam, else it would not shine ; and there is not a wave that restlessly rises and sinks, nor a whisper of the wanton wind that “bloweth where it listeth,” but bespeaks the immediate intervention of God. Marvel not, then, when it is said that we must be born of the Spirit. If not the slightest movement of matter can take place without the immediate agency of God, shall we wonder that his agency is needed in the higher and more subtle processes of mind ? If

every echoing wind bespeak a present Deity, shall it seem strange to appeal to his power in the regeneration of a soul? Each time the furrow opens to the ploughshare, or the sail of the vessel expands to the breeze, we call in the aid of a mysterious agency, without which human efforts were vain. Can it be matter of surprise that the same mysterious agency must be invoked in every effort to break up the hardened soil of the human heart, or to communicate to the dull and moveless spirit of man an impulse towards a nobler than earthly destiny?

II. The sovereignty, or apparent arbitrariness of the work of the Spirit of God in regeneration, is another of those difficulties connected with this doctrine to which the illustration of the text seems to point. It is this to which our Lord seems to refer when he compares the Spirit's agency to that of the wind which "bloweth where it listeth," that is, with inexplicable uncertainty and variableness, or according to laws which are beyond the knowledge and control of man.

And how very much, to human eye, have the relations of God with man, as a religious being, been characterized by an aspect of strange uncertainty and arbitrariness! Religion, with all its ennobling influences, has not been communicated to man universally or indiscriminately. The Spirit of love and life has not breathed over every

sin-blighted land ; but while a few favoured regions have felt its reviving presence, and have begun to bloom with a moral beauty that is not of this world, others, unvisited by its quickening power, remain from age to age in the condition of moral wastes, barren as the desert, or rife only with weeds and thorns. Nor can human research discover any law by which this inequality is ordered. For the partial distribution of spiritual blessings to the nations we can give no other reason than the inscrutable and irresponsible will of a Benefactor who gives and withholds “where-soever he listeth.”

And as little in the case of individuals as of nations can we explain on what principle it is that the gracious influences of the Spirit are vouchsafed. In equal possession of the outward means of improvement, some are benefited whilst others continue unaffected. The seed of truth springs up into rapid and rich maturity in one mind ; in another, on which perhaps it has been more profusely scattered, it remains dormant and unproductive. A word spoken in season, the utterance of a hallowed name, even a mere look of affectionate remonstrance, will fly straight to the core of some human spirit, as if guided by some unerring hand ; whilst on others, all the strength of reason, all the force of logic, all the power of eloquence, may be spent, only to recoil ineffective as arrows from proof-mail. From the furnace of

affliction, one heart, on which an irresistible solvent has been acting, will come forth softened, subdued, spiritualized; whilst others, from the superficial tenderness of unblessed sorrow, speedily cool down into a hardness and insensibility more hopeless than ever. And if this diversity of results is to be ascribed, not to the variety of outward means, but to the presence or absence of an inward influence which alone can render them effectual, can we tell why that influence, given in one case, should be withheld in any other? Is the hand of Jehovah ever shortened that it cannot save? Is the reservoir of grace so scantily supplied that, while some receive the precious dole, others as needy must go unrelieved? Or can we ascribe to Infinite Love the wayward fitfulness of earthly beneficence—to Infinite Wisdom the arbitrary and unreasoning favouritism of weak and erring men? If grace be necessary to conversion; if without it an angel of heaven might preach with heaven's eloquence, yet all in vain; and with it, from the appeals of feeble human lips no careless auditor could retire unaffected, why—are we not tempted to ask—is not the Spirit of God poured forth without measure on every assembly where unconverted souls are to be found? The atmosphere of selfishness broods over the soul and stifles all its glorious capacities of excellence. Oh, why is there not an instant response to the

call, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon this garden, that the spices thereof may flow out?" The dead in sin—the living, lost, never-dying dead—bespread the world, a spectacle more awful than in the prophet's vision; and can it be that boundless mercy surveys it, and yet there is no answer to the prayer, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these dead, that they may live?"

To all such questions—the not unnatural expression of the mind's anxiety in contemplating the seeming arbitrariness of the Spirit's work—we must again reply in the words of the text, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Marvel not nor be disquieted at your inability to explain the laws that regulate the operations of an infinite Agent; for in a province much more within the range of human observation there are familiar agents at work, the operations of which are equally inscrutable, arbitrary, incalculable. Think it not strange that the ways of the Spirit of God are unaccountable to a mind by which even the common phenomena of the wind are irreducible to law. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

And the force of this illustration it will need

little reflection to perceive. For what so fitful, wayward, incalculable, as the operations of the wind? Who can for a single hour foresee, or with certainty pronounce, what its course will be? Sometimes breathing in softness, sometimes rushing in storm; now gently fanning the summer fields, or wandering with scarcely perceptible movement over the vernal earth; anon sweeping and raging along with the wild impetuosity of the winter blast; leaving one spot or one region of the earth parched, cloudless, motionless; for days and weeks stirring not a branch or leaf, as it hangs droopingly in the dry and moveless air, yet at the same time bringing to other regions the fertilizing influences of refreshing gales and showers. And the argument is—If even this simple agent so baffle man's highest wisdom to reduce to known laws its seemingly wayward movements, shall it be thought strange that the ways of the unsearchable Spirit of God are governed by no rules which finite minds can discern? If a phenomenon which, however complex the principles or intricate the conditions involved in it, is still a physical and limited one, present to the acutest minds a problem that is insoluble, what wonder that they should be baffled by the operations of an agent who is limited by no conditions of time and space, and whose every movement is but a part of the vast and mysterious scheme of the moral government of the universe?

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

If the fitful breeze that stirs a meadow or ripples a brook be a subject of investigation too extensive and complicated for mortal intellect to grasp, surely there is little marvel that it cannot explain and calculate the movements of that ineffable Power which works on the scale of infinitude. No: fully to comprehend the measures of the infinite Spirit, so as to see them freed from every semblance of obscurity or arbitrariness, would be an achievement implying a mind infinite as his own; and surely we may defer that enterprise till finite problems have ceased to baffle us.

But the illustration in the text may suggest to us this further thought, that the arbitrariness which characterizes the Spirit's work is, after all, only apparent, and that, beneath seeming irregularity, there is real and unvarying law. It is so with the material agent; it is so with the spiritual, of which that is the emblem. The capriciousness, fitfulness, lawlessness of the wind's motions is only in appearance. The wind never really does act at random. Its endless inconstancies, its ceaseless and unaccountable changes, are the result of material laws as fixed and stable as that by which the planets revolve, or the sun rises and sets. Science, indeed, with all its modern aids and appliances, has made but slight progress in the attempt to trace out the laws of winds and storms, and perhaps this is a province

in which our knowledge must ever be imperfect and vague ; but the vagueness and imperfection is not in nature but in us. . It is only because of the limits of our faculties that we cannot explain the reasons of every vagary of the restless wind, every motion of each ever-changing cloud that forms, and floats, and dissipates, and forms again in the heavens, as easily as we can tell why a stone falls to the ground. And so too, undoubtedly, it is with that of which the wind is set forth as the type, the agency of the Spirit of God. In his most mysterious dealings with the souls of men, God never acts without a reason. Where to us there seems inconstancy, to him all is order. What arrogant impiety rejects as harsh and arbitrary, is, to the mind that alone can comprehend the universe, luminous with the traces of beneficence and wisdom. And all that to human eye seems dark, unaccountable, capricious, in the economy of grace, is so only, we may be well assured, because our feeble minds are incompetent to grasp the explanation. A time was when the starry firmament presented to the eye of man only the aspect of a maze of luminous points, scattered hap-hazard, or moving at random over the heavens ; but at length the great thought was struck out which evolved from all this seeming confusion the most perfect order and harmony. And so, perhaps, a time may come when light shall be thrown on many things

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

that seem mysterious in the arrangements of Providence and in the dispensation of grace, and when the undiscovered spiritual law of gravitation shall reduce all seeming arbitrariness to perfect order and beauty. But meanwhile, in presence of the inscrutable order of God's government, it is the befitting attitude of a creature so weak and ignorant, even in earthly things, as man's experience proves him to be, not to criticise, to question, to doubt; but to submit and to adore.

III. The reality of the work of regeneration may be questioned, finally, because of its secret or imperceptible character; and it is this difficulty which the argument of the text seems specially intended to obviate. Momentous though the change be, which, in regeneration, the soul is supposed to undergo, it is often one of which we have no direct consciousness, no immediate evidence. The finger of the mighty Agent is not felt as he works in the secret depths of our being. Nor is there any external sign, any glory resting on the countenance, any hovering flame or rushing wind, to intimate the presence of the heavenly visitant. Unseen he comes, unseen he departs. Frequently we reach and pass the crisis of our spiritual history all unconscious that an event so extraordinary is taking place within the breast. And it is not strange that a transformation, so utterly unevidenced by sense or consciousness,

should at first sight be regarded as improbable, and that men should sometimes “marvel” when it is said unto them, “Ye must be born again.” We are accustomed to associate great events in man’s earthly history with outward stir and show, outward pomp and circumstance, and we can scarcely divest ourselves of the notion that external significance is inseparable from real importance. When the heir to earthly wealth or grandeur is born, the earliest cry of the feeble babe is the signal for loud and universal gratulation, and by a thousand obtrusive indications the tidings of the joyous event are borne far and wide. When a decisive battle terminates some great struggle, in which the nations are interested, the shout of victory has scarcely died away on the field till it is caught up and reverberated from land to land; and by every outward sign that can give expression to joyful emotion, by banners flung out on every height, and peals echoing on every breeze, do men strive to mark their sense of the magnitude of the occurrence. How strange to be told that an event, infinitely more momentous than these in man’s history, has taken place in silence and secrecy; that a child of the living God—the heir of an inheritance, before which earthly splendours pale—has been born, and yet the event has been unnoticed and unknown; that a conflict, in which the powers of light and of darkness have been engaged, and

the results of which time cannot measure, has been in one auspicious hour decisively terminated; and yet that in profoundest secrecy, without one whisper of triumph to mark it, the victory has been won!

But again let us turn to the simple argument of the text; for here we are taught that the association on which all such incredulity is based—the association between show and reality, outward significance and real importance—is an altogether fallacious one. For the proof that visibility and greatness, power and seeming, are far from inseparable, we are pointed to one out of many similar phenomena which daily meet our observation in the material world. In nature it cannot be questioned that more often than otherwise the greatest powers and agencies are invisible. Known to exist by their effects, in themselves and in their mode of operation they are imperceptible and unknown; so that, to believe only where we see, to discredit the existence and agency of all that is incognisable by sense, would be a maxim as fatal to science as to religion. When the magnet draws the iron, when the needle turns to the pole, who sees the strange influence by which the attraction is effected? What eye can discern the infinitely minute threads of influence that draw the one object to the other? Or, when the earth and other planets revolve round the sun, and the

moon and other satellites around those, who can perceive any mysterious ether flowing from world to world to convey the impulse that moves them? What keenest optics can see gravitation? Manifest by the mighty results it achieves, this greatest of material agents is in itself, and in the mode of its operation, unseen. So too, is it, to name no other instance, with that natural agent to which the text specially refers—the impalpable, viewless wind. Visible in its manifold influences, it, too, is in its essence and operation imperceptible. As you have surveyed the face of nature in some tranquil season—the unbreathing summer noon, or the hushed twilight hour—every feature of the landscape has seemed suffused with calmness, every tree hung its motionless head, every unrippled brook crept on with almost inaudible murmuring, every plant and flower and leaf seemed as if bathed in repose. But anon you perhaps perceived a change passing over the scene as if at the bidding of some invisible power; a rushing sound, as of music evoked by invisible fingers from the harp of nature, began to fill your ear; the leaves began to quiver and rustle, the trees to bend and shake, the stream to dash onward with ruffled breast and brawling sound, and from every wood and glade and glen there came forth the intimation that a new and most potent agent was abroad and working around you. And yet while you

marked this change on the face of nature, did you perceive the agent that effected it? Did the wind of heaven take visible form and appear as a winged messenger of God's will, hurrying hither and thither from object to object? Do you know, and can you describe, the way in which he worked; how his touch fell upon the floweret and bade it wave, or his grasp seized the sturdy oak and strove with it till it quivered and bent? No, you cannot. You have not penetrated so far into the secrets of nature. You have seen only the effects, but not the agent or the process of his working. You have seen the wind's influences, but not itself. But do you therefore marvel, or hesitate to believe that it has been indeed abroad and working over the face of the earth? Or do you ever doubt whether there be any such agent as the wind at all? No; you have heard the sound thereof, you have witnessed the stir and commotion of nature that told of its presence, and so you believe in its existence, though you "cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth."

So it is with every one that is born of the Spirit. You cannot see this mysterious agent any more than those natural agents of which I have spoken. But, as in the one case so in the other, though the agent is invisible, the effects of his operation are manifest. You perceive not the passing to and fro of a mysterious attraction

between God and the soul of man; but you will not seldom see, as the needle is drawn to the magnet, some sinful soul, hitherto fixed in its worldly and selfish insensibility, as if touched by an invisible power, beginning to bestir itself, shaking off the torpor of worldliness and selfishness, and drawn in love and devotion to God and heavenly things. You do not see the gale from heaven, the breath of the Spirit, wafted over any sinner's soul; but ever and anon, if you watch carefully the moral history of your fellow-men, you may perceive in the life of one or another hitherto careless man, a change more or less marked—the visible witness of a hidden and invisible work. Sometimes with gentle touch the Spirit comes. When affliction has softened the heart, when solitude or bereavement has made the soul susceptible of serious thought, when the character is naturally amiable, gentle, impressible, when outward circumstances have been from childhood favourable to piety,—the Spirit of God has often but to breathe, as it were, an insensible movement into the moral atmosphere, in order to waft into the heart the seeds of holiness, and cause the fruits of holiness to spring forth in the life. But sometimes in far different mood the Spirit comes—as if in storm and terror, on the winds of the loud and winter wind. When the heart is hardened by sin, or rendered stern and cold by long resistance

to serious impressions, in these and similar cases the Holy Spirit has often come in influence of terror and alarm, breaking wildly over the trembling soul, and causing it to quake with thoughts of guilt, and death, and judgment, and the wrath to come; and then it has been as if the inner world were shaken to the centre, and in the groans of its anguish or the cries of its penitence—now rising into hope, now sinking into despair—the soul has given witness how terribly the wind of the Spirit was working within it. But neither in his gentle nor in his rougher visitations is the working of the mighty Agent ever immediately discernible. Only by its effects; by the fragrance and beauty of a saintly life, its truthfulness, gentleness, humility, self-denial; or, again, by evil passions rooted up, inveterate sinful habits bent and broken, obstacles to holiness swept away; by the sorrow, the self-abasement, the penitence, the prayers of a soul at the footstool of infinite Justice and Mercy—only by these, its outward effects, can the hidden presence and working of the Holy Spirit be recognised.

It is, then, no marvellous nor incredible doctrine, but one corroborated by the most familiar analogies, that there is a supernatural, sovereign, and secret operation of the Spirit of God on every penitent and believing soul. And this is a doctrine fraught with many obvious practical

lessons. For if the agency of the Spirit be, as we have seen, a supernatural agency—an agency above ordinary means, and apart from which ordinary means must prove ineffectual, consider, for one thing, how urgent the necessity for securing the Spirit's intervention. What an arrest would be laid upon many of the works of man, if that natural agent, to which we have so often referred as the Spirit's type, were suspended! If the wind of heaven ceased to blow, conceive how abortive, in many cases, would be all human industry and skill. The wind withdrawn, the seas and rivers would become leaden and motionless; the sail would hang idle on the mast, and every vessel that floats the seas, arrested on her progress, would be perpetually becalmed. The labours of the husbandman, alike with those of the seaman, would be frustrated. No healthful showers wafted to our fields, every blade would wither, each dry and moveless stalk of grain perish in the growing, every green and beautiful thing decay from the earth's face. The very physical powers of man, deprived of healthful stimulus, would become languid, heavy, laborious, and at last incapable of action. And thus in a thousand ways the activity of man would be in vain, and his utmost ingenuity in the selection of means, or perseverance in the employment of them, fail of achieving any useful result.

But equally fatal, in the spiritual world, to the

success of all human endeavours, would be the withholding of the supernatural grace of the Spirit of God. In vain as the sowing of seed on dry and barren soil, our reading and teaching, our sacraments and solemnities, if the secret grace of germination aid not our efforts. In vain as the spreading of sails beneath windless skies, every aspiration after holiness, every attempt to break away from sin and live for God, if the favouring breath of spiritual influence descend not to co-operate with our endeavours. Pray, then, for the Spirit. In all your efforts to be good or to do good, seek this heavenly aid. Despair of success apart from it; rest not till you have obtained it. The wind comes not at the sailor's or the husbandman's call; but in this, blessed be God, the earthly type is far transcended by the heavenly reality; for the believer is possessed of a spell that can summon the gracious aid of the Spirit in every time of need. The man whose voyage is arrested, and to whom delay is ruinous, may long and pray for the springing up of the favouring breeze, and yet days and weeks may pass, and no answer come. The parched earth may crave for moisture, and while the fruits of his toils are perishing before his eyes, the husbandman may fervently invoke the wind that wafts the shower-laden cloud to his fields, and yet the heavens may still be above him as brass. But not in spiritual things is

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

our gracious Benefactor ever thus inexorable. "Your heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Our progress heavenward need never be delayed, the fruits of holiness need never be blighted, for lack of that heavenly influence. Ask then in faith, nothing doubting. God may not will your earthly prosperity, but your spiritual welfare is dearer to his heart than to your own, and nothing that contributes to it shall be wanting to the earnest suppliant. In every emergency, in every Christian work and effort, therefore, pray for the abundant grace of the Spirit, without which you can do nothing, with which you can do all things.

And if the doctrine of the text furnishes us with a motive to prayer, not less suggestive is it of encouragement to effort. For whilst our natural powers soon reach their limit, to the supernatural aid on which we are encouraged to depend there is none. With the power of God to help him, no man need despair of moral recovery. With the infinite resources of God's grace at our command, no attainment in holiness is beyond our reach. Self-reformation, by the mere strength of human resolution, soon proves a vain attempt; but the effort to repent and turn to God—to regain our lost purity and happiness, cannot fail, when the very power that fashioned our mysterious being prompts and aids in the

work of restoration. What man made, man may repair : but the soul is a Divine work, a thing too noble and delicate, as well as too deeply disordered by sin, to be remoulded and restored by any finite skill or energy. But not to finite skill or energy is the work of restoration committed ; and surely we may labour in this work with the most sanguine hope—nay, with firm assurance of success, when we know that the very mind and hand that devised and framed our spiritual being are working with us for its recovery. “ We are labourers together with God : ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” Nor, with such inexhaustible and ever-accessible help, need we confine our endeavours merely to the restoration of the soul. There is no limit to our possible progress and advancement. The richest soil soon reaches its limit of productiveness. The enterprise of him who seeks earthly wealth is restricted by the extent of his capital or credit. But in spiritual things you need set no such bounds to your efforts : the soil from which the fruits of holiness are gathered is prolific beyond all possibility of exhaustion : it is God who gives the increase. The treasury from which your capital is drawn is one which can never, by your largest demands for aid, be impoverished. Why, then, should any Christian rest content with past attainments ? Every beautiful grace, every noble virtue that has ever adorned the saintliest

of mankind, may be yours. Why should any man be satisfied with small and scanty spiritual gains? In Divine things there can be no avarice: to the most insatiable desire of wealth you may innocently give scope. You are not straitened in God, be not straitened in yourselves.

And again, if the agency of the Spirit is not only supernatural, but also sovereign—if in this respect also it can be likened to that material agent which is set forth as its type, the wind that “bloweth where it listeth”—surely in this aspect, too, the subject is replete with practical significance. For does not the very uncertainty and seeming fitfulness of nature’s influences act as a stimulus to the exertions of man? The fair wind that has long been waited for, and may speedily die away; the spring-tide that comes only at distant intervals, and must be taken at the flood; the balmy season propitious to the husbandman’s toils; the bright moments favourable to intellectual exertion, when thought flows quick, and the spirits are high, and winged fancies come in precious visitations on the soul—is there not something in the very uncertainty and evanescence of these happy influences and golden opportunities that tends mightily to quicken watchfulness and to stimulate effort? And should it not be so in spiritual things too? If, explain it as we may, there is any similar variableness in the times and seasons of religious

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

influence, how urgent the motive thus presented to Christian vigilance in waiting for every favourable opportunity, and to diligence in improving it! It is not for us, indeed, always to know the times and seasons which God has put in his own power; but there are, perhaps, none of us who do not know from personal experience that ever and anon there come to the soul times of visitation, hours of softened feeling and deepened thoughtfulness, when the things of time lose their hold upon us, and the eternal world rolls nearer, with all its grand realities, to the spirit's eye. And are not these the spring-tides of the soul, the seasons propitious to the spiritual husbandry, every moment of which gathers round it the importance of that eternal harvest to which the rapid hours are bringing us? Are not these, in one word, the times when the spiritual gales blow freshest and fairest from the heavens, and the soul, instinct with life, feels every expanded energy yielding to the almost sensible impulses of the Spirit of Truth and Love? How precious such moments! Who that reflects on their worth would not long and pray and watch for their coming, and, while they continue, strain every energy to catch to the last breath the blessing which they bring?

And, finally, in that other aspect in which we have viewed the Spirit's work—as a work secret in itself, yet manifest by its effects—is there not

conveyed to us a lesson of the deepest practical interest? For what inquiry so important to each of us as this, Can I discern in my character and life the signs of the Spirit's presence—the visible proofs of this mighty agent's invisible operation? Unseen he may come; unfelt and imperceptible may be his working, as it blends with the secret springs of thought and feeling within the breast: but wherever he does work, sooner or later, the result will be manifest and unequivocal. The external change, indeed, that indicates his presence may be, to all but the closest inspection, unapparent. For there is a formal and conventional propriety which may spring from many motives short of religious principle—from natural amiableness, from the absence of strong temptations, from the influence of circumstances, from regard to the opinions of men; and the transition from that outward morality which is the product of such motives, to that holiness which is the fruit of the Spirit's work, may, in form at least, be but slightly observable. But slight or marked to the inspection of others, to the inward consciousness of the renewed mind itself the results of the Divine agency will, I repeat, sooner or later be obvious and unmistakable; for that result will be not formal, but real—not outward reformation merely, but a change of heart—not surface goodness, but spirituality of mind and motive flowing out into holiness of life.

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

Apply this test, then, to your own consciousness, and be satisfied with none less searching. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Would you discover whether you "have the Spirit of Christ," whether yours is the destiny of those who have been "born of the Spirit?" Then let not the question be, "Am I leading such a life as to escape the censure or win the commendation of the world?" for the stream may rise as high as its source, and the world itself may supply you with motive sufficient to reach its own standard of moral elevation. Let it not even suffice to ask, "Am I not now a wiser and a better man than once I was?—have I not abandoned many former irregularities of conduct, and ceased to gratify many passions to which in other days I yielded?" For it needs not the interposition of the Spirit of God to dry up the passions of youth, and extinguish the fires of sensuality within us: the inevitable influence of years will serve well enough for that; and the transformation of the heedless, or even vicious youth, into the sober and prudent man, may come as independently of principle, as much irrespectively of a change of heart, as the silvering of the hair or the whitening of the cheek. But the inquiry must be, "Am I leading a holy life, from real, heartfelt self-devotion to Christ?"

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

Are my inward principles, feelings, motives, such as will approve themselves to the eye of Him who seeth in secret? Do I not only outwardly abstain from what is wrong, but do I hate and shrink from sin in my inmost heart; pained when I am betrayed into it, glad when I gain the victory over it? Am I exercising a control, not over my outward conduct merely, but over my thoughts and affections—over my secret habits, dispositions, tempers? Is God so revered and loved in the inmost shrine of my being, that I strive to expel thence every evil thought, every vain, impure, selfish feeling, and to keep the temple of a pure heart sacred to him alone?" By the response which an honest heart yields to such questions as these may we elicit the true answer to that other and most momentous question which involves and comprehends them all, "Have I been born of the Spirit of God?"

**THE
REGENERATE AND UNREGENERATE
COMPARED.**

**BY
THE REV. R. H. SEELEY.**

THE REGENERATE AND UNREGENERATE COMPARED.

HOSEA vi. 4.

“O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.”

MAN was made for religion, just as he was made for human society. He is no more truly adapted by his social nature for association with others of his kind, than he is adapted by his moral nature to possess the affections and fulfil the duties of a religious life.

The entrance of sin into the world has essentially and sadly affected man in both respects. The proper operations of his social nature are marred, misdirected, obstructed, or destroyed by the prevalence of selfishness and evil passions. In like manner the faculties of his religious nature are misdirected, perverted, (or “depraved,”) abused, and, so far as the purposes for which they were created are concerned, destroyed, by the selfish and corrupt tendencies which sin has introduced.

Man's abuse of his social nature discovers itself in the contentions, the cruelties, the crimes that are witnessed in families, neighbourhoods, and nations, to such an extent, that the earth seems like a vast Golgotha covered with the grim and ghastly remains of those who have spent their earthly career in preying on each other's hopes, and happiness, and life.

His abuse of his religious nature appears in the atheisms and impieties, the false religions and superstitions, the errors in doctrine and in practice, which cause the world to appear like another Sodom, in which there is scarcely the proportionate number of the upright to save it from destruction.

Nevertheless, though they are thus seriously and sadly affected in consequence of the fall, neither man's social nor his religious nature is entirely eradicated. Both remain, and, under certain conditions, may be brought into a right state of activity; since proper cultivation in the one case, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost in the other, may give the supremacy to better principles, and bring him to the development of a character for which he was evidently intended by his Creator.

But if this be so, if man's religious nature is not annihilated, but simply depraved by the fall, it is not unreasonable to suppose that its activities and developments in the unregenerate

may sometimes resemble those which are witnessed in the truly regenerated children of God.

The text, as we understand it, contains a reference to a case of this kind. The children of Ephraim and Judah are reprov'd because their "goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew."

The "goodness" here spoken of is not genuine piety, because those by whom it was exhibited were exceedingly rebellious against the Most High, and were charged with the commission of many severe offences. But, at times, they appeared to take pleasure in knowing duty and performing it. They were occasionally moved with devotional feelings, and made a fair show of piety. But this "goodness" did not spring from the depths of their being. It was not a perpetual product of their life. It was not a "fruit of the Spirit." Their religious feelings and activities were transient, ineffective, and worthless. They were like a "morning cloud," that, at the opening day, gives promise of a refreshing shower, but which has not sufficient density to keep it together, and, after floating about for a time without results, finally evaporates and disappears. They are like the "early dew," which looks refreshing and beautiful, as its diamond drops hang trembling on each leaf and flower, but which is dissipated and gone with the first beams of the risen sun.

The text thus teaches us the following important truth, namely, that

The religious feelings and activities of the unregenerate are not genuine piety.

In illustrating this truth, let us,

I. Contemplate the fact that religious feelings and activities are frequently witnessed in the unregenerate.

This fact may be clearly demonstrated by examples drawn from the Holy Scriptures. In the thirty-third chapter of Ezekiel we are informed that the hearers of the prophet took delight in listening to the truths he spoke, and exhorted each other to attend the sanctuary. They worshipped with much outward decorum and apparent devoutness, and professed much affection for the prophet, for the truth, and for its Author. But notwithstanding these appearances of piety, they failed in deeds of righteousness. They would not forsake their sins. They were but passive receivers of religious impressions, which were as transient and ineffective as the emotions aroused in the soul by the voice of a pleasant singer, who skilfully accompanies his song with a well-tuned instrument.

The hearers of the prophet Isaiah presented still stronger indications of piety. They sought the Lord daily, and delighted to know his ways. They desired the ordinances of justice, and took delight in approaching to God—in performing

the acts of devotion. It is evident from the description, that their religious nature was not annihilated, and that their religious sensibilities were awakened. But they were not truly religious. They still were wanting in that which constitutes the essence of genuine piety. They still cherished the love of sin, and the prophet is commanded to "cry aloud, and spare not," while he charges their wickedness home upon them.

The case of Herod may also be noticed as somewhat remarkable. He "feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy." He also took pleasure in listening to his messages of truth, and "did many things" which John pointed out as religiously right. Nevertheless he was a sinner of the most abandoned character, and soon added to his other crimes that of murdering the very man whom, as a religious teacher, he revered, and on whose words of soberness he hung with gladness.

But perhaps the point on which we are dwelling is nowhere more lucidly illustrated than in the parable of the sower, as explained by our Lord himself. "He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for awhile: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also

that received seed among thorns is he that heareth the word ; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."

Here is at least one class of hearers of the gospel (and perhaps two) who receive it with joy—whose religious emotions and activities are aroused by its presentation. But the root of the matter is not in them, and their essential deficiency is discovered if they fall into "tribulation or persecution," into circumstances adapted to test the genuineness of their principles and the strength of their religious devotedness.

What we thus learn from the Holy Scriptures is frequently corroborated by what falls under our own observation. We behold those who are much interested in the truths of the gospel ; who forsake their sins to a great extent, for a time ; who apparently conform to the Divine requirements, display much religious zeal, and seem to possess much feeling and to have much religious enjoyment. Yet the result proves that they have never experienced the renewing of the Holy Ghost ; and when their defection takes place, so much have their religious exercises and activities resembled those of the truly pious, some of us are in doubt whether the genuine children of God have not fallen ; while there are those who are ready to affirm the fact.

These things are sufficient to convince us that

there is, even in fallen human nature, a susceptibility to religious impressions; that the unregenerate are capable of exercising religious feelings, and putting forth acts of devotion. Indeed, we behold proofs of the fact in the religious emotions and deeds of the barbarous, the pagan and the Mohammedan, as well as of the nominally Christian world. It is seen in the life-long fanaticism of some devotees of heathenism; and equally as well in the short-lived enthusiasm of some who hear, yet do not permanently profit by the gospel.

II. Let us inquire how these religious feelings and activities are awakened in the unregenerate.

1. In some they may be the result of education. Education can produce this effect only on minds naturally of mystical tendency; and such may be trained to it amid the fables of heathenism, and the truths of Christianity.

From time immemorial there have been those among the idolatrous religionists of India who have practised methods for bringing the mind into a state of high religious feeling, and even of rapture. For this purpose they observed silence, tranquillity, solitude, and contemplation, as the prime conditions of success. To these they added bodily mortifications and exhaustions by means of fasting, denying all the appetites,

and maintaining a fixed position, endeavouring thus to give the soul the complete superiority and control over the body.

From the east these practices were probably introduced among those who professed Christianity in the early ages of the church ; and substantially the same methods were pursued, with substantially the same results. It would be difficult to decide which were the most successful, the disciples of Brahma, or those who called themselves by the name of Christ. Both practised a rigorous asceticism ; and when bodily privations and exhaustions had, in a manner, overcome the mind's balance, so that a partial insanity was produced, both reached high degrees of rapture, and were, alike, considered saints.

Now there are minds, naturally grave and austere, yet capable of high-wrought feelings and fond of retiring within themselves, which, when educated amid the corresponding influences, are easily and deeply affected, and display strong tendencies to mysticism. If the gloomy, the dreamy, and the austere, rather than the cheerful, the practical and the social features of religion are presented to them ; if they are trained to silence, meditation, and reverie, to practise self-mortifications and think transcendently ; they will probably be gradually moulded into the form of religion of which we are speaking. They will in time be admitted

to the experience of its raptures, or its mental and moral quietude, whether they are educated to believe in the Shasters or the Bible.

2. In persons of somewhat excitable temperament, religious feelings and activities may be awakened by stirring appeals to the passions.

There are those whose temperaments are nervous, whose sympathies are easily kindled, over whom the tones of the human voice, modified by the passions, and employed by an ardent, enthusiastic speaker, have a tremendous power. If the intellect of such persons is well cultivated, well disciplined, and well informed, they are more under the influence of reason, they have more self-control, and are not so easily moved by extraneous influences. But without this culture, they are lacking in balance, their nerves and sympathies have the preponderance, and they are easily moved and moulded. If a subject—no matter whether true or not, so that it be novel in fact or form, and so that it meet the condition of their understanding, or commend itself to their sympathies—if such a subject be presented with exciting forms of address, if it be strongly put, defended by bold and sweeping denunciations, and urged in appeals to the passions, these minds will be the first to feel the enchantment and to be carried away.

So true are these remarks, that, if you are well acquainted with the peculiar temperament

and intellectual idiosyncrasies of the several inhabitants of a neighbourhood, you can point out, with much ease and certainty, the particular persons who will be the first to adopt a new notion, to be entrapped by an extravagance, to take the lead in an exciting measure.

Now, these are the very ones who are liable to have devotional feelings awakened, and to be aroused to an apparent religious activity by the mere force of exciting circumstances. When the minds of many are deeply interested in religious subjects, as is the case in revivals; when powerful influences are brought to bear upon them, as in protracted and camp meetings; or when a persuasive orator is urging the claims of truth, or even of falsehood, such minds are deeply moved; and without stopping to look at principles, and fulfil the prime conditions of acceptance with God, they are ready to regard their excited feelings as the genuine affections of religion, and conclude that they have experienced the renewing of the Spirit—that they are the children of God.

3. The religious sensibilities are awakened, in still another class, by appeals to the senses.

Those of whom we now speak are, from want of intellectual and moral culture, not accustomed to find any impulses to moral action within. They are mainly influenced by others on whom they lean as guides, or are moulded entirely by

the circumstances in which they live. They are, for the most part, passive recipients of outward impressions.

If pagans, they are deeply affected by the mysterious rites of their religion. The solemn stillness of the idol-temple, the presence of the gods whom from childhood the devotee has been taught to regard with feelings of reverence and of terror, the smoke of incense and of burnt-offerings, curling to the temple's vaulted roof, the prayers and incantations of priestly worshippers—all these meet his eye and ear, and affect his heart. Thus the feelings of the idolater are fired, and the superstitions of his soul aroused; till he worships with as much devoutness and strength of emotion as a human being is capable of knowing.

If he be a Mohammedan, his mind is filled with the legends of the Moslem faith. Demons, good and bad, are supposed to be in every place and thing, so that he dares not let down a bucket in a well, or pour water on the ground, or light a fire, or throw down a stick of wood, without asking permission of the spirits that may chance to be there. In this way, something meets his eye or ear on every occasion; some form of prayer or some charm must be resorted to as a defence from these numerous demons, by which means his superstitious beliefs are kept alive, and his soul is perpetually strung to an enthusiastic pitch of devotion.

In these circumstances, the main solemnities of his religion produce a wonderful effect on him. When the voice of the muezzin, pealing from the lofty minaret, announces the hour of prayer, the Moslem is ready to obey the summons, and worships with much apparent, and probably much actual, religious feeling. Or when he enters the mosque—with slippers laid aside, because he treads on holy ground—and engages in the solemn rites of worship there conducted, his reverence for the holy place, his awe of the Being there worshipped, his multiplied superstitions, and the excitements of the occasion, all conspire to excite his devotional feelings to an intense degree of fervour, and frequently produce an actual frenzy.

Analogous effects are sometimes produced on the nominal Christian in much the same manner. One who is somewhat ignorant and disposed to be superstitious, and who is thus susceptible of impressions from appeals to the senses, enters an old or stately cathedral. The light, mellowed in passing through stained and painted windows, falls richly on the broad and pillared aisles. Paintings, descriptive of well-known Scripture facts, hang on the sacred walls. Music in its most effective form—the grand and stately harmonies of the old masters, bearing on their wings the deeply religious sentiments of the mass and anthem—floats in the lofty arches and

fills the soul. Tapers are burning before the distant altar. Clouds of incense rise from censers swung by youthful hands, and the robed priest bends before the symbols of his faith, chanting the ancient services of his church, or waiting the response from the uplifted voices of the choir. The wants of the senses are thus fully met. The imagination is excited. The heart is deeply moved. The religious sensibilities are awakened ; and the devotee bends in adoration of the passing host, overwhelmed with the depth and strength of his emotions, while, from the character of his feelings, he judges himself a true and acceptable worshipper of the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity.

4. Devotional feelings frequently result from, or are connected with, the exercise of taste and the poetical faculties generally.

Those who delight in the union of art with religion, who are fond of architectural display, whose imagination is excited by the idea of antiquity and the recollection of old historic incidents in connexion with the mysteries and poetries of religion, who admire the order and uniformity, while they are pleased with the splendours of a ritual worship,—such are frequently the subjects of intense devotional feelings as, in some grand and lofty fane, they engage in the solemn rites of religion, meditate on its sacred themes, and yield themselves up to the

influence of the holy place and hour. Commencing with a dreamy, poetical devoutness, that may frequently be found in the regions of taste, they in many instances reach a state of high-wrought feeling that even converted men, of more matter-of-fact cast of mind, never experience.

Again, one who is by nature gifted with a lively perception of congruity, fitness, symmetry, beauty and sublimity in art and in nature, can hardly be a consistent atheist. He may be an immoral man, a neglecter of religious duty, and may even assert his disbelief of the Divine existence; yet when he views these things as matters of taste and cultivation, he can no more think with pleasure of the universe without a God than he can regard a human statue with a serpent's head, or without a head, as a finished piece of sculpture; he can no more be satisfied with his own neglect of the moralities and devotional sentiments of religion than he could admire a piece of landscape painting from which some main elements of the beautiful were omitted, or into which some monstrous and incongruous things were introduced.

Consequently, we find some of the most unbelieving and dissipated of the poets uttering some of the most deeply religious sentiments of the believing heart.

Shelley, for example, who with his almost unequalled poetical gifts united some of the most

revolting principles of unbelief, could both acknowledge a God and delight in the evidences of his presence, when the exercise of his taste had drawn him aside from his scepticism. The following lines will show the operation of his mind on such occasions :—

“The Spirit whom I loved in solitude

Sustained his child ; the tempest-shaken wood,
The waves, the fountains, and the hush of night—

These were his voice ; and well I understood
His smile Divine, when the calm seat was bright

With silent stars, and heaven was breathless with delight.”*

In similar circumstances Thomas Moore, who, from the loose morals of his writings, has been aptly styled “the Irish Anacreon,” could pen some of the finest, and even some of the most devotional hymns in the language. The pious muse of Cowper himself could not have expressed his recognition of, and confidence in God, with more aptness and beauty than in the following by Moore :—

“There’s nothing bright above, below,
From flowers that bloom to stars that glow,
But in its light my soul can see
Some feature of thy Deity.
There’s nothing dark below, above,
But in its gloom I trace thy love,
And meekly wait the moment when
Thy touch shall turn all bright again.”

Notwithstanding the dissipated habits of Robert Burns, and the opposite current of his thoughts

* “Revolt of Islam,” canto i. 45.

for the most part, there were moments when his poetical inspiration was united with a high degree of devotional feeling. We need not quote many examples illustrative of the fact. We simply give four lines, in which the sentiment of submission to the Divine will is expressed in a manner never excelled by one not inspired by the Spirit of God :—

“Thou Power Supreme, whose mighty scheme
These woes of mine fulfil,
Here firm I rest : they must be best,
Because they are thy will.”

Those who are accustomed to the work of composition know that sentiments cannot be expressed in this manner without some corresponding feeling on the part of the writer. They are frequently reproduced, moreover, in those who read, and especially those who sing them. Indeed, they cannot be correctly rendered, either by the reader or singer, till the appropriate feelings are kindled in his soul ; and we are disposed to think that the unconverted members of church choirs are often the subjects of strong religious feelings when engaged in singing the praises of God. Both the sentiments and the music, if well adapted to each other, conspire to produce this effect ; and possibly many such regard the feelings thus awakened as undoubted evidence of their own good religious state, believing themselves actual possessors of true piety.

III. In the third place, we propose to show in what respects the religious feelings and activities of the unregenerate differ from those of the genuine disciple of Christ.

1. They differ in their causes and objects.

All genuine and acceptable devotion is a result of the Holy Spirit's influence on the soul. It is inseparably connected with penitence for sin, and with an affectionate confidence in Him who is revered and feared. It is the appeal of a soul that knows its own entire unworthiness, and feels its dependence on Christ alone for pardon and acceptance with God. It is the grateful offering of a heart that is filled with a sweet sense of forgiveness—that, being justified by faith, has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is an expression of the soul's admiration of the perfectness of Jehovah, and its reverence for his great and holy name. It is based on an intelligent view of the Divine character and attributes, in their just relations to the universe, and especially to the creature who bows in worship. It must, therefore, and does, regard the Most High as its supreme object of complacency and delight. It looks to him as the sum of all goodness and the source of all hope, with appeals for the supply of the soul's necessities and the fulfilment of its holy desires. It is the communion of an affectionate child with a tender parent,

of a penitent prodigal with a forgiving father, of a redeemed sinner with his reconciled God and Saviour.

But little of all this is discoverable in the devotional feelings of the unregenerate. There is not the least evidence, in their nature and modes of manifestation, that they are produced by the influence of the Holy Ghost. They are awakened in the soul in a way that excludes the necessity of supposing a supernatural cause. They result from the employment of methods that might be equally successful if there were no Holy Spirit, no God in the universe. They are not necessarily connected with intelligent views of the Divine character. Most of the essential attributes of Jehovah—such as his justice and his holiness—may be unknown or denied; and his relations to the universe, and especially to mankind, as expressed in Christ the Mediator, the crucified Redeemer, the risen Saviour, the reigning God, “the way, the truth, and the life,” may be entirely left out of view. There may be in them an acknowledgment of personal unworthiness, yea, even a deep sense of sin; but there is no adequate conception of the evil nature of sin, of the impossibility of its being cancelled by creature merits, of the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice to its remission.

There is in them, consequently, none of the

faith that reconciles the soul to God through the Mediator; none of the gratitude of a soul that feels itself plucked from destruction by a Redeemer's merits; none of the affection for Christ that is cherished by one who relies on his bleeding mercy, and perceives his infinite excellence.

There is in the devotional feelings we have been contemplating none of that intense desire for forgiveness that is felt where the direful consequences of sin are perceived; or if forgiveness be sought, there is none of that longing after holiness, that "hungering and thirsting after righteousness" in the life here, and as a preparation for heavenly fellowship and duty, which is manifestly an essential element of all true and acceptable devotion. Indeed, so far from thinking of the absolute necessity of holiness as a preparation for duty on earth and enjoyment in heaven, this devotion of the unrenowned soul may not admit the idea of its necessity as a preparation for duty here; it may not rise so high as to contemplate an eternal existence of holiness, and happiness as a consequence of the holiness; but may expend itself in contemplating the immediate circumstances and accessories of devotion, and in cultivating and exercising the feelings they produce.

2. Brief continuance is another usual characteristic of the religious feelings of the unregenerate.

We have seen that genuine devotional feeling

is produced by the influence of the Holy Spirit; and while it contemplates Divine excellence in contrast with personal unworthiness, it is the grateful expression of the soul's affection for its Redeemer, and its admiration of his infinitely perfect character. It therefore rises to God by affinity and continuously, as the starting germ rises to the light. It may receive aid from the circumstances and accessories of worship, as the germ by fertilizing substances in the soil. But it does not depend on these alone. Like the germ, the soul has been quickened by the Almighty. There is in it a vital force that perpetually struggles for greater development, and thus seeks to keep the soul in communion with God.

It is not so with those who are unrenewed in heart. There is nothing in their moral affections to prepare them for spiritual worship and impel them to it. There is no affinity between the moral condition of their souls and the holiness of the high and lofty One, that draws out their feelings and aspirations toward him by a perpetual attraction. Devotion is not a normal action of the soul; religious feeling is not a normal feeling. It is therefore brief in duration. It is an affair of seasons, a product of circumstances; it is an exception, rather than the general law of the mind. It continues only while the poetical afflatus is on the soul, while the imagination is in lively exercise, while the

mind is acted upon by excited nerves ; or it rises only where the taste is gratified by the forms and circumstances of worship, where the sacred associations and influences of the house of God disturb the usual condition of the soul, and induce thoughts and feelings which are not congenial to its general state and tastes, to which at other times it is a stranger.

For, as these outward circumstances are not permanent, and the mind cannot be under their influence all the time, its apparent religiousness will disappear with them. When the claims of business begin to press, when the cares of the world again fill the mind, when the desire of riches and the pride of life spring up in the heart, when temptations assail the soul, and the appetites and passions gather force, then this "goodness" which was not caused by the Spirit of God, which did not commence with repentance and faith, and which did not lean upon a crucified Saviour for its sustenance, passes away "like the morning cloud and as the early dew."

3. Its ineffectiveness is another characteristic in which it specially differs from genuine religious feeling.

Genuine religion is a "power," a vital force in the soul. It leads and it enables its possessor to "overcome the world." It strengthens the soul against temptation, and tends to eradicate sin and the love of sinning from the heart.

It is a strong affection, a divine and holy love. It casts out fear from the mind and fills it with admiration of Christ, while it impels to the imitation of his character, and awakens an ardent desire for his approbation in all things. It begets a holy confidence in God, and rejoices in hope. In the exercise of this confidence and hope, the believer denies himself and presses on in the path of duty and holiness, exclaiming, "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

It is not forgetful of man, while it believes and hopes in God. It seeks the good of its neighbour, and is full of active efforts on his behalf.

It is thus a positive principle, as well as a devotional feeling, and manifests its power in all the relations of being.

But the religious and devotional feeling of the unregenerate is the opposite of all this. It is not a "power," in the same sense; it is not a vital principle; it is not an abiding and strong affection of the soul for God and man. It is for the most part but a negative principle, evaporating in poetical effusions, or exhausting itself in the overwhelming excitements of an occasion. Its subject may worship and adore the deity of his own imagination; he may venerate the temples, times, and forms, in which that deity is wor-

shipped; he may receive the truth with a transitory joy, and form hasty resolves to follow its instructions; but his joy is transient as the early dew, his resolutions of amendment are fruitless as the morning cloud. Selfishness still remains the controlling power of the soul; worldliness appears unchecked in all the hopes and conduct of life; the love of sin, like an evil spirit, takes possession of its swept and garnished home in the heart, and reigns without a rival as soon as the hour and forms of devotion are ended.

These remarks are applicable to most cases. Yet there are instances among Hindoo and Mohammedan devotees, as well as among enthusiasts of nominal Christendom, where the religious sensibilities are thoroughly awakened, and religious feeling assumes a permanent type, while, notwithstanding, there is nothing of genuine religion in its inception, middle, or end. In some instances it runs into fanaticism, and is in fact a species of insanity; in others it cools down into bigotry and formalism. In the one case it exhausts itself in feeding and watching the flame of its own feelings; and in the other, thinks more of the scaffolding and adornments of religion, than it does of the main edifice.

Its spuriousness may be seen in the fact that it has necessarily no connexion with the peculiar and distinguishing truths of the gospel; not an inkling of the purity, charity, and holiness it

requires; not the faintest resemblance to the spirit and character of genuine piety. It may be possessed by the nominal Christian who never raises a thought above the rosary, the picture, the image, the genuflexions, and other concomitants of devotion; and by the Mohammedan dervish whom it drives to feats of fanaticism almost superhuman, while of the actual virtue of religion he is, and is content to be, profoundly ignorant. It appears in the Hindoo ascetic, who, blinded by the myths of his religion, fails to catch one glimpse even of the God of nature; and in the savage barbarian, whose mind is imbruted, whose soul and body both are degraded by his most cruel and bestial modes of life. And, what should be noticed, it is essentially the same thing in all. It commences in much the same manner; its developments are extremely similar in their effects on the character and life. Change a few of the forms and names, and let all speak the same language, and it would be impossible to tell, from the spirit and temper and general characteristics of this fanatical and formal type of religion, whether its subjects are Mohammedans or barbarians, Hindoos or nominal Christians. It therefore fails to meet the approval of Him who made man for religion, but who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and who seeketh such to worship him as will worship him in spirit and in truth.

May be had, uniform with the present work

THE ATONEMENT;

Being Four Discourses by

CHARLES, LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER.

DR. CHALMERS.

W. ARCHER BUTLER, M.A.

ROBERT HALL, M.A.

Foolscap 8vo. 1s. 6d., cloth boards.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET,
AND CHARING CROSS. .



BT
790
.W74

263554

Wilson
Regeneration

.. 29 188

Bindery

BT

790

.W74

WILSON

Regeneration

263554

Bindery

JUN 18 1971